

Genesis 31:1-21
Jacob Secretly Leaves for Canaan

Jesus Christ

- Joseph
- The apostle Paul
- Moses
- David
- Jacob

Those men have a lot in common with one another

- But there is one thing that I would like to highlight this morning

At some point in their lives, these men were misunderstood

- Because they were misunderstood, these men were also mistreated
- This is true of many other men and women in the Bible

Perhaps even you fall into this category

- Perhaps you have been misunderstood at times
- Perhaps you have been mistreated as a result of this misunderstanding

If so, I believe this morning's message will be encouraging to you

- The reality is that we will be misunderstood at times

Let's be honest with ourselves

- There are times when we misunderstand others
- Right?

The first part of Genesis 31 is a wonderful reminder of how God takes care of His children

- Especially when His children are misunderstood and mistreated

Let's read Genesis 31:1-21

Jacob will receive the word to leave Haran and return to Canaan, the land of promise

- As God's people, we can learn three lessons from this passage this morning
 - o God's people must obey God's Word (31:1-3)
 - o God's people must remember God's promises (31:4-16)
 - o God's people must trust God's timing (31:17-21)

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I. God's people must obey God's Word (31:1-3)

Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what belonged to our father he has made all this wealth."

At the end of his fourteen (14) years of service to Laban, Jacob desired to return to Canaan

- His obligations to Laban were over
- He had performed his duties

But Laban didn't want to see Jacob leave

- He was a great servant
- Laban was being blessed by the LORD because of Jacob
- Laban would also lose the privilege of seeing his two daughters and his grandchildren if Jacob left

So Laban told Jacob to name his wages (30:28)

- In other words, what would it cost to keep Jacob around?

Jacob's answer was a little puzzling, at least initially

- Jacob wanted the multi-colored offspring
- Laban could keep the pure colored offspring

Laban and Jacob struck an agreement

- But Laban immediately sought to turn the tables on Jacob

Jacob planned on going through the flocks and selecting the multi-colored animals

- Through these animals, Jacob reasoned that he could breed them and receive offspring that were spotted, speckled, or striped

But Laban changes the rules of the agreement

- Laban gives Jacob only pure colored animals to begin with
- No doubt, Laban knew that the pure colored animals would have a higher probability of producing other pure colored animals

This would mean more livestock for Laban

- And it would mean less livestock for Jacob

But God was gracious to Jacob in giving him plenty of multi-colored livestock

- We saw that last week

But as Genesis 31 opens, there is trouble in the air

- Laban's sons are complaining about Jacob's success

Laban's sons accuse Jacob of stealing "what belonged to our father"

- In their mind, Jacob had deceitfully stolen that which belonged to their father, Laban

But had Jacob been deceptive?

- Had he not used wise practices related to selective breeding?

Jacob was dealing with a very cunning individual in Laban

- Laban was always changing the rules
- Laban didn't make life easy for Jacob

But why were Laban's sons so concerned about Jacob?

- Because they feared that Jacob was taking away their inheritance!

When we think of an inheritance, we oftentimes think of money

- CD's
- Mutual funds
- Savings account
- Life insurance policies

But in the time of Jacob, inheritance was thought of in different terms

- Land was a huge part of the inheritance
- Cattle and other livestock were part of the inheritance
- There was also the reality of money as part of the inheritance

As Laban's sons saw Jacob prospering, they saw their own inheritance diminishing

- Genesis 30:43 says, "So the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys"
- Jacob was becoming a wealthy man!

But Laban's sons overlooked the fact that Laban was prospering as well¹

- Look at Genesis 30:30, "For you had little before I came, and it has increased to a multitude; and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned"

Jacob was being blessed by God

- But so was Laban

Laban's sons had also overlooked the reality of their father's manipulative ways

- We will see later on this morning how Laban constantly changed the wages for Jacob²

² And Jacob saw the attitude of Laban, and behold, it was not *friendly* toward him as formerly.

But Jacob had another person to deal with

- Not only were Laban's sons jealous
- But Laban himself was upset

Moses tells us that Laban "*was not friendly toward him as formerly*"

- Things had changed in the mind of Laban
- He felt that he had been cheated

From what we know about Laban, he was not a man you wanted to cross

³ Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you."

What does Jacob do now?

- Laban's sons are jealous of him
- Laban himself is upset with him

At just the right time, the LORD speaks to Jacob once again

- The word of God could not have come at a better time

The LORD tells Jacob to "*return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives*"

- 20 years prior, Jacob's mother Rebekah told him to stay with Laban "*a few days*" (27:44)
- "*a few days*" turned into 20 years

¹ Derek Kidner, *Tyndale OT Commentaries, Genesis*, 164.

² W.H. Griffith-Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*, 284.

Jacob is a different man now than when he left Canaan

- Sure, he still has some of the same sinful tendencies
- But God had been working on him

Now it is time for Jacob to return to the land of Canaan

- As the seed of Abraham, Jacob had a huge responsibility back in Canaan
- Haran was not his ultimate home

The LORD also tells Jacob, “**and I will be with you**”

- The promise of the presence of God was a huge encouragement for Jacob

He had first been given this promise back in Genesis 28 when he was given a dream involving the ladder sent down from heaven

- He saw a ladder
- He saw angels ascending and descending on the ladder
- Then he saw the LORD Himself

The LORD promised Jacob

- Land (28:13, 15b)
- Descendants (28:14a)
- Blessing (28:14b)
- The presence of God (28:15a)

Listen to these words from God toward God at Bethel, “**And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you**”

- God would be with Jacob
- God would protect Jacob
- God would bring Jacob back to Canaan
- God would not leave Jacob until God’s purposes were fulfilled

Theoretically, those promises sounded pretty good

- But for a man who had been deceived for 20 years, the reassurance of God’s promise was priceless

For 20 years Laban had treated him like a servant, not family

- But God was with him

For 20 years Laban had deceived him numerous times

- But God was with him

For 20 years Laban had sought to use Jacob for his own selfish means

- But God was with him

The promise of the presence of God must have been an encouragement for Jacob

- Throughout all the dealings with Laban
- Throughout all the strife with his four wives
- Throughout all the tough times

The same is true of us as New Covenant believers

- We are assured of the presence of God in our lives

Listen to these familiar words, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt 28:18-20, emphasis mine)

- God is with us “always”

It doesn't matter whether you are having good times or bad times

- God is with you

It doesn't matter whether you are being treated poorly or well

- God is with you

It doesn't matter if you are encouraged or discouraged

- God is with you

God came to Jacob at a very difficult time in his life

- The Word of God was clear
- Jacob was to return to Canaan

Did Jacob obey?

- Would he trust God?

The same could be asked of us

- Are we obedient to God's Word?

Granted, God no longer speaks audibly like He did with Jacob

- We have something better than what Jacob had

We have been given the entire written revelation of what God would have for us to know of Him

- Are you reading God's Word?
- Are you meditating on God's Word?

It is very difficult to obey God's Word when you don't know it!

- I trust that the Scriptures are an important part of your schedule
- Make time for the Word of God, every day

Not only must God's people obey God's Word

- *Secondly, they must...*

II. God's people must remember God's promises (31:4-16)

⁴ So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to his flock in the field, ⁵ and said to them, “I see your father's attitude, that it is not *friendly* toward me as formerly, but the God of my father has been with me.

Jacob has just been told by the LORD Himself to return to Canaan

- But he must not tell Laban or his sons about this news

So Jacob calls for Rachel and Leah

- Meeting in the field would provide more secrecy and privacy
- There would be less of a probability of someone overhearing their conversation

The time has come for Jacob to speak with Rachel and Leah about their father's dealings with him

- He has to be careful, however
- These are Laban's daughters

How would they respond to Jacob's speech?

- Would they be supportive of a move to Canaan?
- Would they be supportive of leaving their father?

Jacob begins by citing the difference in Laban's attitude

- Nothing is mentioned about the jealousy of Laban's sons
- The primary issue is with Laban, not his sons

Even though Laban's attitude was different, Jacob affirms **“the God of my father has been with me”**

- We see an allusion to the presence of God in the life of Jacob

The presence of God was an encouragement and support for Jacob during these rough years

- And he conveys that to his two wives

On a sidenote, we are only told of Jacob meeting with Rachel and Leah

- What about Zilpah and Bilhah?

These two wives weren't included in the private conversation since they were not the daughters of Laban³

- Jacob's primary concern was with Rachel and Leah

⁶ And you know that I have served your father with all my strength. ⁷ Yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times; however, God did not allow him to hurt me.

In verse 6, Jacob appeals to the personal knowledge that Rachel and Leah had of their father

- He says, **“and you know...”**
- They couldn't deny what Jacob was saying

Jacob affirms, **“I have served your father with all my strength”**

- You can hear the heart of this man
- He has given 20 years of hard work in service to Laban
- He had performed his duties with diligence, not laziness

How had Laban treated Jacob in exchange for his hard work?

- Verse 7 gives the answer, **“Yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times”**

What we have assumed up to now is made very clear

- Laban had **“cheated”** Jacob

Literally, Laban had “made a fool of” Jacob

- It is used of making one's public reputation suffer⁴

Jacob says that Laban had **“changed my wages ten times”**

³ Kenneth A. Mathews, *NAC, Vol 1B.*, 512.

⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 2*, 271.

We know of a few times of Laban's deception toward Jacob

- On his wedding night, Laban gave Leah to Jacob
- After their contract was agreed upon, Laban took away all the multi-colored animals that Jacob was counting on

Laban was a manipulating manager

- He was always changing the wages of Jacob
- Whatever would benefit Laban more

Some of the information that Jacob shared with Rachel and Leah was probably new to them

- No doubt he had kept some of this to himself over the years
- It had been a private, personal burden that he carried

But above and beyond anything that Laban could do to Jacob, we are told that **“God did not allow him to hurt me”**

- What an encouragement this is!

Remember what God had promised Jacob at Bethel?

- **“And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go”** (28:15)

We see Jacob's trust in God's presence and protection

- He is not a bitter man
- Rather, he is a blessed man

⁸ If he spoke thus, ‘The speckled shall be your wages,’ then all the flock brought forth speckled; and if he spoke thus, ‘The striped shall be your wages,’ then all the flock brought forth striped.

Verse 8 is a sad commentary on the character of Laban

- Laban was not a man of his word
- He could not be trusted

If Laban told Jacob that he could keep the speckled offspring, then the flock produced speckled

- But Laban would change his wages

If Laban told Jacob that he could keep the striped offspring, then the flock produced striped

- But Laban would change his wages

This would be like a boss changing your hourly rate at work

- You set your budget for \$20/hour
- But then your boss lowers it to \$15/hour
- This would change your earnings!

Laban was a very controlling individual

- He wanted to be in charge
- He wanted to call all the shots

⁹ Thus God has taken away your father's livestock and given them to me.

Jacob confesses that God is responsible for his success

- Verse 9 says that “God has taken away your father’s livestock and given them to me”

The verb “taken away” is an interesting term to choose

- It implies that God gave Jacob something that belonged to Laban
- It implies a transfer of ownership!

In Genesis 30, we had the perspective that it was Jacob’s methods that brought about the increase

- Here in Genesis 31, Jacob confesses that it was God who brought about the increase⁵

¹⁰ And it came about at the time when the flock were mating that I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the male goats which were mating were striped, speckled, and mottled.

As Jacob witnessed the mating of the animals, he had another dream

- He had seen and heard from the LORD at Bethel
- Now he has a second dream

No doubt, the LORD wanted to reveal certain information to Jacob that he would not know otherwise

We remember from Genesis 30 that Jacob was given only pure colored animals to mate

- Hence, he relied upon the recessive gene within those animals to produce multi-colored offspring

But apparently God gave Jacob a dream that reassured him of success

- As the pure colored animals were mating, God allowed him to see “striped, speckled, and mottled” animals

Jacob could not see into the genetic structure of those animals

- But God could

Jacob could not control the offspring of those pure colored animals

- But God could⁶

¹¹ Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, ‘Jacob,’ and I said, ‘Here I am.’ ¹² And he said, ‘Lift up, now, your eyes and see that all the male goats which are mating are striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you.

In this dream, “the angel of God” spoke to Jacob

- We have seen references to “the angel of the LORD” (16:7, 9, 10, 11; 22:11, 15)
- We have also seen a reference to “the angel of God” (21:17)

These all refer to the same Person

- That Person is God Himself

⁵ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 189.

⁶ Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 480.

As we will see in verse 13, the Angel of God is the same God Who revealed Himself at Bethel

- The Angel of God is Yahweh

God was reassuring Jacob that He would bring about multi-colored animals for him

- God was the Creator of the universe
- He could produce whatever offspring He desired from the pure colored animals

It must have been really great for Jacob to hear the angel of God say, “**I have seen all that Laban had been doing to you**”

- Nothing escapes the ever-watching eye of God
- He sees everything

Of course, this is both an encouraging and convicting characteristic of God

- He sees when we have been deceived
- But He also sees when we have deceived others

But God is acting in the behalf of His child, Jacob

- He is putting His plan into action to counter the manipulation of Laban

¹³ I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me; now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth.’”

In verse 13, the angel of God identifies Himself, “**I am the God of Bethel**”

- The angel of God is the same God who appeared to Jacob in the dream at Bethel!

God reminds Jacob of the pillar that he set up

- And God reminds him of the vow that Jacob made

In case you have forgotten what Jacob promised, turn back to Genesis 28

- Let’s begin with verse 20, “**Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, ²¹ and I return to my father’s house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. ²² And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God’s house; and of all that Thou dost give me I will surely give a tenth to Thee’” (28:20-22)**

Had God been faithful?

- God had been with Jacob
- God had protected Jacob
- God had provided for Jacob

God had been faithful, but would Jacob?

- Would Jacob give a tenth to God?

One thing is for sure

- When Jacob was at Bethel the first time, he didn’t seem to have much money or possessions
- But on the return trip, he was a very wealthy and blessed man

In verse 13, God tells Jacob once again, “**now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth**”

- Three short commands
 - o Arise
 - o Leave Haran
 - o Return to Canaan

Now that Jacob has repeated what God had told him, the big question still needed to be answered, “How would Rachel and Leah respond?”

- Verses 14-16 answer that question

¹⁴ And Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, “Do we still have any portion or inheritance in our father's house? ¹⁵ Are we not reckoned by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and has also entirely consumed our purchase price.

It is sad to hear the two daughters of Laban speak about their dad

- They don't have anything praiseworthy to mention
- They don't have anything exemplary to mention

Rachel and Leah tell Jacob that they don't have any hopes of inheritance through their father

- As a matter of fact, they feel as if they have been treated like “**foreigners**”!

Any inheritance money that should have been theirs has been wasted by their father

¹⁶ Surely all the wealth which God has taken away from our father belongs to us and our children; now then, do whatever God has said to you.”

Rachel and Leah also confess that whatever inheritance that Laban has wasted, God has given back some of it to Jacob

- They seem to share a part of the blessing that Jacob has enjoyed

What encouraging and supportive words do Jacob's two wives share with him, “**Now then, do whatever God has said to you**”

- No better words could be uttered by a wife toward a husband!

It seems that Jacob is now the leader of the family⁷

- He is not being the timid, passive pushover that he was in earlier chapters
- He is no longer the “momma's boy” that he was back in Canaan

His two wives support Jacob in whatever decision he makes

- They can't trust their own father
- But they can trust their husband

Jacob had been married to these women for 13 years

- During those 13 years, Rachel and Leah saw how their father treated him
- They both loved Jacob and realized that it was in their best interest to leave and go to Canaan⁸

⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 424.

⁸ Morris, 481.

Isn't it ironic that this notorious deceiver is now the epitome of integrity?

- Jacob who once couldn't be trusted can now be trusted!

Fathers, I believe God would have us pause and ask ourselves a question, "Are you like Laban?"

- If I would interview your family, what would they say about you?
- Would they tell me of your love and support and encouragement?
- Would they tell me of your integrity and Christlikeness?

Or, would your family tell me of your lies, deception, and lack of godly character

- Do they feel more like an outsider than a part of the family?

Don't think for a second that just because you are a Christian that your family will survive on auto-pilot

- Fathers, take the time to shepherd your families
- Be proactive in dealing with sin in your life and the lives of those in your family
- Spend time in the Word and prayer with your children and wife

We have seen two lessons thus far:

- *God's people must obey God's Word (31:1-3)*
- *God's people must remember God's promises (31:4-16)*
- *But thirdly...*

III. God's people must trust God's timing (31:17-21)

¹⁷ 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.

With the revelation of God and the support of his family, Jacob puts the plan into action immediately

- He puts his children and wives on camels
- This method of transportation would have been much easier and faster than on foot⁹

The fact that Jacob has enough camels for his four wives and twelve children reminds us of his great wealth

- Camels were only for the wealthy
- But Jacob has enough for his entire family

Next, Jacob drives his livestock toward the land of Canaan

- Notice the emphasis on "**his acquired livestock**"
- He only takes those animals that God had given to him
- He didn't steal any animals that belonged to Laban
- Once again, he displays integrity

When Jacob left Haran, it must have been a long caravan

- Four wives
- Twelve children
- Paid servants
- Countless livestock
- Other possessions

⁹ Mathews, 517.

The mention of “his father Isaac” helps us to gain a larger perspective of these events

- Jacob is the seed of Abraham who would inherit the blessings of God
- Isaac is the father of Jacob’s and the son of Abraham

It is very easy for us to get lost in details of these events

- But God has a much bigger plan in mind
- His plan encompasses more than Jacob

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.

The timing in which Jacob decides to leave is also perfect

The Text tells us that “Laban had gone to shear his flock”

- This was a wearisome task that took several days
- It would have meant early mornings and late evenings¹⁰

Laban and his sons would have been distracted

- They would not have noticed Jacob, his family, and his livestock leaving Haran

The Text alerts us that “Rachel stole the household idols that were her father’s”

- From what we understand from the context, Rachel didn’t inform Jacob of this decision
- She acted totally on her own

These “household idols” are the Hebrew term *teraphim*

- They are spoken of fifteen times in the OT¹¹

In some cases, like Genesis 31, the teraphim were small enough to be put into a small pouch

- In other cases, the teraphim were quite a bit larger, even as big as a human being (1 Sam 19:13, 16)

They have a variety of purposes as well¹²

- Some think that they would guarantee fertility and other blessings, almost like a good luck charm
- Ancient extra-biblical texts tell us that they were a part of the sons’ inheritance
- Others hint that these teraphim were consulted for divination purposes¹³
- Perhaps these gods were thought to have helped interpret dreams¹⁴

It is clear that Laban used them for religious purposes

- In Genesis 30:27, Laban confesses, “I have divined that the LORD has blessed me on your account”

Rachel brought about sinful consequences by stealing her father’s gods

- Perhaps she was not wholly committed to the God of Jacob
- Perhaps she wanted a little bit of “luck” for the journey

¹⁰ Waltke, 427.

¹¹ Wenham, 273.

¹² John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison*, 251-54.

¹³ Morris, 482.

¹⁴ Victor P. Hamilton, *NICOT, Genesis 18-50*, 293.

It is intriguing to compare Rachel and Jacob¹⁵

- Before leaving Canaan for Haran, Jacob had stolen the blessing from his father
- Before leaving Haran for Canaan, Rachel had stolen the teraphim from her father

Moses mentions that “**Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean, by not telling him that he was fleeing**”

- We could argue back and forth about whether or not Jacob should have told Laban
- Simply put, he outwitted Laban¹⁶

The reality is that Jacob wanted to leave six years prior

- However, Laban was able to barter for six more years of service from Jacob
- I doubt that Laban would have ever allowed Jacob to leave under his own terms¹⁷

Jacob and his family and his livestock fled

- They were leaving as fast as they could

As we see them disappear on the horizon, we are told that they crossed the Euphrates River and were heading for Gilead

- It seems that they escaped without being noticed

But Laban would find out what he had done

- Would he pursue Jacob?
- What would happen?

This and other questions will be answered next week

- I know that you will join us as we continue to walk through this ancient book of Genesis

How do you respond to criticism and false accusations?

- Do you take these matters to the LORD?
- Or do you take matters into your own hand?

Jacob entrusted himself to the LORD

- And the LORD honored that

Do you quickly obey the word of God?

- Or do you delay obedience?

Jacob quickly obeyed and told his family why they should leave

Are you a person of integrity and truth, even when others around you don't display those same character traits?

- No doubt some of you have difficult co-workers
- What kind of a message do you send to them?
- Do they see a difference between your work ethic and theirs?

¹⁵ John H. Sailhamer, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Genesis*, 205.

¹⁶ Waltke, 428.

¹⁷ Leon J. Wood, *A Shorter Commentary on Genesis*, 111.

I trust that you will honestly put these principles into practice

I also pray that you will take the time to examine your heart in light of the Lord's Table