GENESIS 31

Jacob Leaves In Secret

1 Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons. They said, "Jacob has gotten all this wealth[i] by taking away all that was our father's."

2 When Jacob looked at Laban's face, he saw that Laban was not as friendly as he was before.

3 Then Yahveh said to Jacob, "Go back to the land of your fathers and your kindred. I will be with you."[ii]

4 So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field to his[iii] flock. **5** He said to them, "I see that your father's attitude to me is not like it was before. But the Elohim of my[iv] father has been with me. **6** You know that I have served your father with all my power. **7** You know that your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten[v] times. But Elohim did not let him hurt me. **8** If he said,

> 'The speckled will be your wages,'

"then all the animals gave birth to speckled animals. If he said,

> 'The striped animals will be your hire,'[vi]

"then all the cattle gave birth to striped animals. **9** Therefore, Elohim has taken away your father's cattle and has given them to me.[vii]

10 "It came to pass at the time when the cattle were conceiving that I lifted up my eyes and saw a dream. I saw the rams that were mating were striped, speckled, and grizzled. **11** And the Angel of Elohim spoke to me in a dream. He said, 'Jacob!'

"And I said, 'Here am I.'

12 "And He said,

> 'Lift up your eyes and see. All the rams that mate with the cattle are striped, speckled, and grizzled. For I have seen all that Laban has done to you. **13** I AM the EL of Bethel,[viii] where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now get up. Get out of this covenant[ix] land. Return to the land of your kindred.' "

14 Then Rachel and Leah answered him, "Is there any portion or inheritance remaining for us in our father's house? **15** Doesn't he see us as foreigners?[x] For he has sold us and has completely devoured our money. **16** For all the riches that Elohim has taken from our father is ours and our children's. Now then, whatever Elohim has told you, do it."

17 Then Jacob rose up and set his sons and his wives on camels. **18** Then he carried away all his cattle and all his goods that he had gotten in Padan Aram *and started* to go back to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan.

19 When Laban went to shear his sheep, Rachel stole the idols[xi] that were her father's. **20** Then Jacob left, and Labor the Syrian did not notice him leaving. No one told him that Jacob had left. **21** So he left with all that he had. He got up, passed over the river, and set his face toward Mount Gilead.

22 They told Laban about this on the third day after Jacob had left. **23** So he took his relatives with him and pursued Jacob. They caught up with Jacob seven days later at Mount Gilead. **24** That night Elohim came to Laban, the Syrian, in a dream. Elohim said to him, "Be careful that you don't speak to Jacob either good or bad."

25 Now Jacob had pitched his tent on the mount when Laban caught up with him. So Laban and his family also set up their tents at Mount Gilead.

26 Then Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? Why did you run away without telling me? Why did you carry my daughters away as if they were captives taken with the sword? 27 Why did you sneak away from me and flee away secretly? Why didn't you tell me so that I might have sent you away with joy, and with[xii] songs, and with tambourine, and with harp? 28 You didn't even give me a chance to kiss my sons and my daughters! You were very foolish in doing this!

Elohim Intervenes

29 "It is in the power of my hand to do you harm. But the Elohim of your[xiii] father spoke to me last night. "He said,

'Be careful that you don't speak either good or bad to Jacob.'

30 "And now, you have surely gone away[xiv] because you longed for your father's house. Yet why did you steal my gods?"

31 And Jacob answered and said to Laban, "Because I was afraid. As I said,

'Perhaps you would take your daughters from me by force.'

32 "With whomever you find your gods, let them not live. Before our relatives, identify anything that you think belongs to you, and take it."

Rachel's Deception

But Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen her father's idols. 33 So Laban went into Jacob's tent. Then he went into Leah's tent. Then he went into the two maidservants' tents. He did not find his idols anywhere. Then he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's tent. 34 Now Rachel had taken the idols, put them in the camel's furniture, and sat on them. Laban searched the whole tent but did not find the idols.

35 Then Rachel said to her father, "Please don't be angry with me for not getting up. The custom of women is on me."[xv]

So he searched but did not find the idols. 36 Then Jacob was angry and rebuked Laban. He said to him, "What is my trespass?[xvi] What is my sin[xvii] that you have so hotly pursued after me? 37 What of all your household stuff did you find after you searched all my stuff? Set it here before my family and your family, that they may judge[xviii] between us both. 38 I have been with you for 20 years. None of your ewes or your she-goats miscarried their young. I never ate any of the rams of your flock. 39 I suffered the loss[xix] of what the beasts tore. I never brought any of those to you. You made me pay full price for all losses, whether someone stole them by day or by night. 40 As it was, the heat burned me during the day. I could not sleep at night because of the frost. 41 Thus, I have been 20 years in your house. I served you 14 years for your two daughters and 6 years for your cattle. You changed my wages ten times. 42 If the Elohim of my father,[xx] the Elohim of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had not been with me, surely you would now have sent me away empty. Elohim has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands. He rebuked[xxi] you last night."

Covenant at Mizpah

43 Then Laban answered Jacob, "These daughters are my daughters. These children are my children. These cattle are my cattle. All that you see is mine. What can I do this day for these my daughters, or for their children to whom they gave birth? 44 Therefore, come now. Let us make a covenant, me and you. Let it be a witness between me and you."

45 So Jacob took a stone and set it up for a pillar. 46 Then Jacob said to his sons, "Gather stones."

So they gathered stones and made a heap. Then they ate there by the heap. **47** Laban called it Jegar-Sahadutha,[xxii] but Jacob called it Galeed.[xxiii]

48 Laban said, "This heap is a witness between me and you this day."

Therefore, they called it Galeed. **49** He also called it "Mizpah,"[xxiv] for Laban[xxv] said, "May Yahveh watch between me and you when we are absent one from another. **50** If you afflict my daughters, or if you take other wives beside my daughters, although no one is with us, remember that Elohim is witness between me and you."

51 Then Laban said to Jacob, "See this heap and look at this pillar. I have set them up between me and you. **52** This heap will be a witness, and this pillar will be a witness. I will not pass over this heap to you, and you will not pass over this heap and this covenant[xxvi] pillar to me for harm. **53** May the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Nahor,[xxvii] the Elohim of their father, judge between us."

And Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. **54** Then Jacob offered sacrifice on the mount and called his family to eat bread. So they ate bread and stayed all night on the mount. **55** Laban rose up early in the morning, kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them. Then Laban left and returned to his place.

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i The Hebrew כָּבוֹד means weight. In a good sense, this weight is glory, honor, property, riches, or wealth. In a bad sense, this weight is a burden (Exo 18:18), disgrace (Prov 3:35), dullness, humiliation, or stubbornness (Exo 7:14).

ii Genesis 28:15.

iii Jacob had separated himself from Laban. He had "his" own flock.

iv Note the pronoun. Jacob has not yet committed himself to the God of Israel.

v This does not have to be exactly 10. It is an expression of completeness (Gen 31:41, Num 14:22, Neh 4:12, Job 19:3, Dan 1:20). Jacob has reached the end. He does not want this treatment to continue.

vi Genesis 30:32.

vii This is the true explanation of the rods. It didn't matter what they looked like, when he used them, where they were placed, or which animals they were put before. Elohim determined the results!

viii The Hebrew הָאֵל בֵּית־אֵל means "the God of Beth-El." Bethel means "House of God." A reasonable option for the whole phrase is: The God of the House of God.

ix The Hebrew זֹאת is a Zayin-**Aleph**-**Tav**. Its basic meaning is to cut, either as a blessing or a judgment. This translation routinely renders this 3-letter word in terms of covenant. See the article "The **Aleph**-**Tav**."

x The Hebrew נָכְרִי (*nawch-ree*) means foreigner or stranger. It is more general than גֵּר (*gawr*), a foreigner or stranger who is regarded as a resident alien who temporarily lives there. The Hebrew נָכְרִי (*nawch-ree*) carries a stronger sense of national or ethnic difference. Other related terms include זוּר (*zoor*), which emphasizes moral or religious estrangement; גֵּר (*geyr*), a sojourner who lives among Israelites and is protected by law; and תּוֹשָׁב (*to-shawv*), a resident alien without full covenant rights.

xi The idols are little figurines. The Nuzi tablets discovered in 1925 show that they used idols for evidence of property ownership. Rachael stole them so that she could lay claim to Laban's property when he died. She felt justified in doing this because of the way Laban had mistreated them over the years.

xii The literary technique of Polysyndeton uses multiple "and with"s (or other conjunctions) in a series. It slows the reader and gives emphasis to each item.

xiii The pronoun shows that Laban knows what Jacob has not yet confessed.

xiv The Hebrew phrase וְעַתָּה הָלוֹךְ הָלַכְתָּ literally means, "And now, going, you have gone." The verbal infinitive absolute (הָלוֹךְ) plus the Qal Perfect (הָלַכְתָּ) is often used for emphasis.

xv Even here, long before the encoded law in Leviticus 15:20, a woman's menstrual period is seen as ritually unclean. Everything she sits on is considered unclean. Laban wanted to avoid becoming unclean. Moreover, his cherished idols were now fittingly defiled.

[xvi] The Hebrew פֶּשַׁע means a revolt. Synonyms include rebellion, transgression, trespass, and guilt/punishment/offering of transgression. A transgression is crossing the line. Sin is missing the target. Iniquity is something twisted.

[xvii] The Hebrew חַטָּאֵת (*chaht-taw-awt*) means sin and sin offering. Synonyms include sinful, sinner, punishment for sin, and purification of sins. A transgression is crossing the line. Sin is missing the target. Iniquity is something twisted. As a theological word-picture, the Het (ח) suggests an enclosure or a boundary, picturing separation or misalignment. Tet (ט) conveys something inward or hidden, reflecting the internal nature of sin. The **Aleph**-**Tav** (**אֵת**) is a picture of Jesus. Together, the word picture portrays sin as an inward corruption and separation from God. At the same time, it points toward the divinely appointed act (Jesus) that marks, resolves, and completes the matter.

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[xx] Still! He does not confess that God is his God.

[xxi] The Hebrew יָכַח means to appoint, correct, decide, or judge rightly. It often appears in legal or judicial contexts. Here, God is not just "deciding" but expressly confronting or reproving Laban for wrongdoing. "Rebuke" captures this tone of firm correction or admonition.

[xxii] "Witness heap" in Chaldean.

[xxiii] Jacob also called it "witness heap," but in Aramaic.

[xxiv] This means watchtower.

[xxv] The text uses a third-person verb: "he / she / it." The use of "Laban " is for readability.

[xxvi] The Hebrew זֹאת is a Zayin-**Aleph**-**Tav**. Its basic meaning is to cut, either as a blessing or a judgment. This translation routinely renders this 3-letter word in terms of covenant. See the article "The **Aleph**-**Tav**."

[xxvii] Even Laban confesses God via his father.