



## TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

### Talk Genesis 31:1-21: Jacob Heads for Home

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#### Lesson 70

*"Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has acquired all this wealth." 2 And Jacob saw the countenance of Laban, and indeed it was not favorable toward him as before. 3 Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you."*

*4 So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field, to his flock, 5 and said to them, "I see your father's countenance, that it is not favorable toward me as before; but the God of my father has been with me. 6 And you know that with all my might I have served your father. 7 Yet your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me. 8 If he said thus: 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore speckled. And if he said thus: 'The streaked shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore streaked. 9 So God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me.*

*10 "And it happened, at the time when the flocks conceived, that I lifted my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the rams which leaped upon the flocks were streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted. 11 Then the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, 'Jacob.' And I said, 'Here I am.' 12 And He said, 'Lift your eyes now and see, all the rams which leap on the flocks are streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. 13 I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family.'"*

*14 Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? 15 Are we not considered strangers by him? For he has sold us, and also completely consumed our money. 16 For all these riches which God has taken from our father are really ours and our children's; now then, whatever God has said to you, do it."*

*17 Then Jacob rose and set his sons and his wives on camels. 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. 19 Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel had stolen the household idols that were her father's. 20 And Jacob stole away, unknown to Laban the Syrian, in that he did not tell him that he intended to flee. 21 So he fled with all that he had. He arose and crossed the river, and headed toward the mountains of Gilead."*

#### Background Notes

As Jacob became more and more prosperous, Laban and his sons began to take a different attitude toward Jacob. No longer was Jacob the one that was making Laban wealthy, but the one who was taking away Laban's wealth. So Jacob was ready to make a change, and it was at this point that God spoke to Jacob in a dream. God told Jacob in no uncertain terms to return home. *"I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and*

where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family" (v13).

This is the first time in twenty years that we read of God directly communicating with Jacob. It had been twenty years since God revealed Himself to Jacob at Bethel. God had promised Jacob then that He would bring him back home safely, and now that time had come. God made that promise in Genesis 28:15: "*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 spoken to you.*"

So Jacob gathered up his wives, his children, his servants, his flocks and herds, and headed back home, as we see in verse 21: "*So he fled with all that he had. He arose and crossed the river, [the Euphrates River] and headed toward the mountains of Gilead,*" The mountains of Gilead are the mountains on the east side of the Jordan River, in the country of Jordan today.

But Jacob didn't tell Laban that he was leaving! Why not? Well, this would only have led to further friction. How could Jacob handle all these logistics without Laban knowing about it? I think verse 19 gives us the key: "*Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep.*" So Jacob took this opportunity to make his move as quickly as possible.

Verse 19 tells us that Rachel had stolen her father's "household gods." Why would Rachel do that? Was she an idolater? There may have been several reasons. The household idols ("terephim,") were small portable idols, mostly feminine fertility figurines. They were thought to bring blessing and protection on the home and on the land, as well as bring children to the barren. Rachel may not have been clinging to these pagan ideas and wanted to take these "gods" with her, especially since she had been barren, and still only had one child, Joseph. Another reason may have been that Rachel was getting back at her father for his unfair treatment of Jacob and the family.

Furthermore, we read that both Leah and Rachel were concerned about their inheritance from their father. "*Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? 15 Are we not considered strangers by him? For he has sold us, and also completely consumed our money"(v14-5).*" We know from ancient records known as the Nuzi tablets that, in that culture, the household gods were used as the title deeds to the property. So it's possible that the primary reason why Rachel stole these household gods was to ensure her rights to her portion of the family property in the future. She may have taken these household idols for any or all of these reasons. We'll read more about these idols in Genesis 35.

## **Doctrinal Points**

### **1. God is concerned about the unfair treatment of His children.**

Notice what the Lord said to Jacob at the end of verse 12: "*I have seen all that Laban is doing to you.*" God was aware and concerned about the unfair treatment that Jacob was receiving from Laban. We learn from verse 7 that Laban had deceived Jacob and changed his wages ten times -- and never a raise! In a six-year period, that is a lot of wage reduction! This was unfair treatment, and God was aware. Although God had allowed Jacob to be in this situation because Jacob had some hard lessons to learn, He was watching and He was concerned about this unfair treatment.

Maybe you're in a situation where you are being treated unfairly. The Lord may have allowed this situation in your life to let you learn some hard lessons -- like patience, like humility, or maybe even to appreciate what our Lord went through when He was here on this earth. But the Lord knows your situation, and He is concerned about the unfair treatment that you may be receiving. In his time, He will vindicate you.

Recently a young Christian man mentioned to me that he is being treated unfairly at work. He should have been promoted, or at least given a raise, but he has been passed over several times. I shared this story from the life of Jacob and reminded him that because God knows and cares, the story isn't over yet. God is concerned about the unfair treatment of His children.

## **2. God can use the unfair treatment of His children to guide them.**

Not only did God use the unfair treatment in Jacob's life to teach him some lessons in the School of God, He also used it to guide Jacob to leave Haran and go back home. The Lord showed Jacob what He wanted him to do in two ways. First, He told him directly: *"Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family"*(v13). Second, God guided Jacob with circumstances, and the circumstances were the unfair dealings of Laban. God uses circumstances today to help guide His children, and sometimes these circumstances include unfair treatment.

I know the Lord used the circumstance of unfair treatment in the workplace to help guide me out of secular employment and into the Lord's work full time. As a research engineer, I had the very unpleasant experience of having my immediate boss claim the good research that I did as his own work -- but he never took responsibility for anything that went wrong! I was ready for a change. I was ready to move when the Lord opened the door for full time Christian service. If it hadn't been for the circumstance of unfair treatment, I'm not sure if I would have been so willing to follow the Lord's possible guidance. Maybe the unfair treatment that you are experiencing right now is a means by which the Lord is speaking to you, as the means by which the Lord is guiding you. God can use the unfair treatment of His children to guide them. We see that in the life of Jacob, and it may be true in your life as well.

### **Practical Application**

#### **Your genes were packaged by God.**

You're probably thinking, "What is he talking about? What kind of practical application is that?" Well, I don't mean the "jeans" that you wear, but your DNA "genes"! Look again at what Jacob said about his dream in verse 12: *" And He said, 'Lift your eyes now and see, all the rams which leap on the flocks are streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you.'"*

In other words, God was controlling the packaging of the genes of these animals. Now if God can control the packaging of the genes in animals, can He do it with people? Of course He can! Can He do it with a person like you? Of course He can! Has He done it with you? Yes, He has! Of course He has! Your genes were packaged by God!

You don't think you're just a random package of genes that "just happened" to get together, do you? No way! You were programmed by God to be **you**. Everything about you was designed by God from the beginning. You are special! You were designed to fill a niche that no one else can fill! Your genes were packaged by God.

Maybe you feel that God made a mistake. Maybe you feel like you're not smart enough, or you're not good-looking enough, or you don't have a special talent – that you're not what you would like your basic genetic code to be. Maybe you feel like you're like one of those striped sheep or goats, and you would rather be a "pure white" sheep, or a "pure black" goat! Listen, God packaged up the genes of those animals the way He wanted for a purpose, and God made you just the way you are for a purpose. God has a special purpose for you. Read Psalm 139:13, and be encouraged, because **your** genes were packaged by God!