

### Jacob Heads for Home

#### Genesis 31:1-21

Genesis 31:1-21 - *"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.'" <sup>2</sup> And Jacob saw the countenance of Laban, and indeed it was not favorable toward him as before. <sup>3</sup> Then the LORD said to Jacob, 'Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you.'*

*<sup>4</sup> So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field, to his flock, <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> And you know that with all my might I have served your father. <sup>7</sup> Yet your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> So God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me.*

*<sup>10</sup> "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. <sup>11</sup> Then the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, 'Jacob.' And I said, 'Here I am.' <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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.'"*

*<sup>14</sup> Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? <sup>15</sup> Are we not considered strangers by him? For he has sold us, and also completely consumed our money. <sup>16</sup> 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."*

*<sup>17</sup> Then Jacob rose and set his sons and his wives on camels. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel had stolen the household idols that were her father's. <sup>20</sup> And Jacob stole away, unknown to Laban the Syrian, in that he did not tell him that he intended to flee. <sup>21</sup> 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 towards him. No longer was Jacob the one who was making Laban wealthy, but the one who was taking Laban's wealth away.

And Jacob was ready to make a change. At this point God spoke to Jacob in a dream and told him 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).

As far as the biblical record goes, this was the first time in 20 years that God communicated directly with Jacob. 20 years earlier God revealed Himself to Jacob at Bethel, and He promised Jacob that He would bring him back home safely. 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."*

Now that time had come. So Jacob gathered his wives, children, servants, and flocks and herds, and headed back home. *"So he fled with all that he had. He arose and crossed the [Euphrates] river, and headed toward the mountains of Gilead"* (v21). 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, because this would have led to further friction. So how could Jacob handle all these logistics without Laban knowing about it? 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 says that Rachel had stolen her father's "household gods." Why? Was Rachel 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 have been clinging to these superstitious pagan ideas and she wanted to take these "gods" with her - especially as she had been barren, and still only had one child, Joseph. She also may have been getting back at her father for his unfair treatment of Jacob and the family.

Furthermore, both Leah and Rachel were concerned about their inheritance from their father. *"Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? Are we not considered strangers by him? For he has sold us, and also completely consumed our money"* (v14-15). We know from ancient records called the Nuzi tablets that, in that culture, the household gods were used as the title deeds to the property. So the primary reason why Rachel stole these "household gods" may have been 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.

## 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 He was concerned about the unfair treatment that Jacob was receiving from Laban. Verse 7 says 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 of it. Although God had allowed Jacob to be in this situation to teach him some hard lessons, God was watching. He was concerned about how Jacob was being treated.

Maybe you're in a situation in which you're being treated unfairly. The Lord may have allowed this situation in your life to help you learn some hard lessons - like patience, or humility, or maybe even to appreciate the unfair treatment our Lord endured when He was here on this earth. But God 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 told me that he's 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 with him, 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.**

God used the unfair treatment in Jacob's life to teach him some lessons in the School of God - and 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 – the circumstance of Laban's unfair dealings with Jacob. God can use circumstances today to help guide His children, and those circumstances may include unfair treatment.

The Lord used the circumstance of unfair treatment in the workplace to help guide me out of secular employment and into full-time service for Him. 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 any research that went wrong! So 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 ready and willing to follow the Lord's guidance. Now I'm thankful that the Lord allowed that unfair treatment in my life!

If you're experiencing unfair treatment, it may be a means by which the Lord is speaking to you, and by which the Lord is guiding you. God can use the unfair treatment of His children to guide them – as in the life of Jacob, and in my life, and maybe in your life as well.

## **Practical Application**

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

You're probably thinking, "What kind of practical application is that?" Well, 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 as well? 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're not just a random package of genes that "just happened" to get together, are you? No way! You were programmed by God to be **you**. God designed everything about you 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.

But maybe you feel that God made some mistakes. Maybe you feel like you're not smart enough, or you don't have a special talent, or you're not very good-looking. Maybe you feel like you're like one of those striped or spotted sheep or goats, and you'd rather be a fluffy white sheep, or a handsome pure black goat! If you feel that way, remember this: 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, just as you are! Psalm 139:13 says, *"You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb."* So - be encouraged, because **your** genes were packaged by **God**!