

Genesis Chapter 31

Verses 1-24: Laban became openly hostile to Jacob. Therefore, God told Jacob to return to the land of Canaan, "And I will be with thee". His wives agreed. They said, "Whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do." Laban had changed Jacob's wages "ten times", even though "God suffered him not to hurt me."

"Images" Many have supposed that the theft of the images secured an inheritance for Jacob. In the ancient Nuzi texts the gods were given as part of an inheritance. However, heirs who did not receive the gods also participated in the division normally granted to the eldest son. The possession of such gods did not represent an automatic claim to an inheritance.

Possibly Rachel took them as an extra precaution, since she was leaving her homeland and would have little other legal claim to her father's inheritance.

Verses 1-2: Of materialistic bent and envious at Jacob's success, Laban's sons grumbled at what they saw as the depleting of their father's assets, thus hurting their own inheritance. If Jacob heard of this, so did Laban, and that knowledge rankled him to the point of uncontrolled anger toward his son-in-law (31:20). Which was one thing, but seeing only Jacob blessed was quite another matter and elicited no praise or gratitude to God from Laban.

Genesis 31:1 "And he heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all that [was] our father's; and of [that] which [was] our father's hath he gotten all this glory."

"And he heard the words of Laban's sons": That is, Jacob, as is expressed in the Septuagint and Syriac versions, either with his own ears, overhearing their discourse in their tents, or in the field.

Or from the report of others, his wives or some of his friends, who thought proper to make him aware of it. These were the sons of Laban, who had the care of the cattle committed to them, separated by the direction of Jacob, and with the consent of Laban (Gen. 30:35).

"Saying, Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's": Meaning not precisely all that their father had, for that would have been a downright lie; for what was become of them that were committed to their care?

Besides, we read afterwards of Laban's shearing his sheep (Gen. 31:19). But that all that Jacob had was their father's, and he had taken it away from him, if not by force and stealth, yet by fraud. So, Jacob might fear he would treat him in an ill manner, and therefore began to think it was high time for him to be gone.

"And of that which was our father's hath he gotten all the glory": His many servants, numerous cattle, sheep, camels and asses, in which carnal men place all their happiness, or those riches, as the Targum of Jonathan, by which he got the name and glory of a rich man among men.

And it was so far true what they say, that it was out of their father's flock that Jacob got all his increase; but then it was according to a covenant that Laban and he entered into, and therefore was obtained in a just and lawful manner.

The sons of Laban were not thankful for the great wealth they had acquired through Jacob, but had become jealous after the separating of the animals, because God abundantly blessed Jacob. Now, these ungrateful boys were saying that Jacob had no legal right to them, that he had taken them from Laban.

Genesis 31:2 "And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it [was] not toward him as before."

"And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban": Upon this he observed Laban's looks that he might gather from thence how he took his prosperity. What were his thoughts about it, and what he might expect from him on that account?

"And, behold, it was not towards him as before": He said nothing to Jacob, nor charged him with robbing of him, or any false dealing with him, yet was uneasy at his growing prosperity. He put on sour looks, and an envious facial expression, sad, and surly, and let down, so that Jacob saw it foreboded no good to him, and therefore thought it most advisable to depart as soon as he could.

Perhaps he first sought the Lord about it who spoke to him as (in Genesis 31:3).

Genesis 31:3 "And the LORD said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee."

"And the Lord said unto Jacob": In answer to a prayer of his; or seeing what difficulties and discouragements Jacob labored under, he appeared unto him for his encouragement and instruction how to proceed.

"Return unto the land": The land of Canaan, given to Abraham and Isaac by promise. When Jacob sought to leave at the end of his contract (30:25), God's timing was not right. Now it was, so God directed Jacob's departure, and in confirmation assured him of His presence. So, after another 6 years, it was time to go (verses 38-41).

"And to thy kindred": His father and mother, and brother, who all dwelt in the land of Canaan at this time, or as many as were living: or "to thy nativity", the place where he was born, and to which he must have a natural desire to return.

"I will be with thee": To protect him from any injury that might be attempted to be done unto him, either by Laban or Esau.

Here, we see Laban had turned against Jacob. God told Jacob to pull up stakes and go home to his family. Again, God promised to bless Jacob.

Genesis 31:4 "And Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field unto his flock,"

"And Jacob sent": Having this encouragement and direction from the Lord, which seems to have been given him in the field, while he was attending his flocks, he dispatched a messenger home to his wives, by one of his servants or under shepherds.

"And called Rachel and Leah": Rachel is mentioned first, as being his proper and lawful wife, and is only called so (Gen. 46:19). It was for her sake Jacob had Leah. Jacob, a prudent man and an affectionate husband, thought proper to acquaint his wives with his case, and advise them, and neither leave them nor take them away suddenly by force; and therefore, sent for them.

"To the field unto his flock": Where he was feeding his flock: this he might do for different reasons. He might not judge it so proper and convenient to go home to them, since it might be difficult to get one of them to come to the apartment of the other. It was proper they should be together, and that might cause some suspicion in Laban's family, who might listen to overhear what passed between them.

Besides, he might be afraid of Laban and his sons, that being in such an ill temper they would lay violent hands on him, and do him harm. And therefore he sent for his wives to him in the field, where they could more privately and freely converse together, without being overheard or interrupted, and the flock in the meanwhile, were not neglected.

Genesis 31:5 "And said unto them, I see your father's countenance, that it [is] not toward me as before; but the God of my father hath been with me."

“Your father’s ... my father”:

"And said unto them, I see your father's countenance, that it is not towards me as before" (see Genesis 31:2). A contrast, perhaps not intentional: but nevertheless noticeable since their father signaled rejection toward him, whereas the God of his father had accepted him. No notice is taken of what their brethren, the sons of Laban, had said.

"But the God of my father hath been with me": Not only by affording him his gracious presence with him, which supported him under all his troubles; but by his good providence prospering and succeeding him in his outward affairs, as well as he had lately appeared to him, and encouraged him to return to his own country.

Verses 6-9: As Jacob explained it, his unstinting service to their father had been met by Laban with wage changes intended to cripple his son-in-law's enterprise, but God had intervened by blocking the intended hurt (verse 7), and overriding wage changes with great prosperity (verse 9).

Genesis 31:6 "And ye know that with all my power I have served your father."

"And ye know, that with all my power I have served your father": With all faithfulness and uprightness; with all diligence and industry. With all wisdom and prudence; with all my might

and contriving the best methods, and sparing no pains by day or night to take care of his flocks, and increase his substance.

This his wives had been witnesses for twenty years past, and to them he appeals for the truth of it; so that there was no just reason for their father's behavior towards him.

God had made Jacob aware that all was not well with him and Laban. Jacob could not privately speak to his wives, when Laban was there. He has called them away from the house to explain to them what he had to do, and why it was necessary.

Jacob had seen the look on Laban's face and realized they were about to have trouble. He realized this was the father of his two wives. He did not want to lose their love over this. He was explaining in detail that he had kept his side of the bargain, even though Laban had tricked him over and over.

Genesis 31:7 "And your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times; but God suffered him not to hurt me."

"And your father hath deceived me": In the bargain he had made with him about his wages for keeping his cattle the six years past, after the fourteen years' servitude were ended.

"And changed my wages ten times": That is, either very often, many times, as the number ten is sometimes used for many (see Leviticus 26:26). Or precisely ten times, since he repeats it afterwards in the same form to Laban's face (Genesis 31:41).

He had now served him six years upon a new bargain; that he should have all that were of such and such different colors, which were produced out of his flock of white sheep. Laban was at first highly pleased with it, as judging it would be a very good one to him, as he might reasonably think indeed.

It is highly probable he did not attempt any alteration the first year, but observing Jacob's cattle of the speckled sort, immensely increasing, he did not choose to abide by the agreement any longer. Now it must be observed, that the sheep in Mesopotamia, as in Italy, brought forth the young twice a year.

So that every bearing time, which was ten times in five years, Laban made an alteration in Jacob's wages; one time he would let him have only the speckled, and not the ringstraked; another time the ringstraked, and not the speckled; and so changed every time, according as he observed the prevailing color was, as may be concluded from (Genesis 31:8).

But God suffered him not to hurt me; to hinder his prosperity, or having justice done him for his service. For whatsoever color Laban chose for Jacob to have the next season of producing, there was always the greatest number of them, or all of them were of that color, whether speckled or ringstraked.

Genesis 31:8 "If he said thus, The speckled shall be thy wages; then all the cattle bare speckled: and if he said thus, The ringstraked shall be thy hire; then bare all the cattle ringstraked."

"If he said thus, the speckled shall be thy wages": Sometimes Laban would say to Jacob, only the speckled lambs which the ewes shall bring forth shall be thine hire, and not the spotted; or the ringstraked, or the brown, which according to the bargain should have been his, the one and the other.

"Then all the cattle bare speckled": That season, God ordering it so in his providence, that Laban might be disappointed, and Jacob might have his full hire; that is, the greatest part of the cattle bore such, as Ben Melech observes.

"And if he said thus, the ringstraked shall be thine hire": Observing the cattle to bring forth only speckled, or the greatest part such, then he changed his hire, and would have it be not the speckled, nor the brown, only the ringstraked, there being none or few of that color the last bearing time.

"Then bare all the cattle ringstraked": Or the greatest part of them were such; so that let Laban fix on what color he would as Jacob's wages, there were sure to be the greatest part of that color; which shows the hand of God in it, as is next observed by Jacob.

Genesis 31:9 "Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given [them] to me."

"Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father": Not all of them (see Gen. 31:19). But a great part of them; his flock was much lessened by those means, and more were taken away, and came to Jacob's share, than if Laban had abode by the original agreement.

"And gave them to me": Who has the disposing of all things in the world, owns the world, and all in it, are, and gives of it to the sons of men as he pleases? Jacob takes no notice of any artifice of his, or of any means and methods he made use of, but wholly ascribes all to the providence of God. He points to his wives to the hand of God only.

It seems to be by his direction that he took the method he did, as appears (from Genesis 31:11).

All of these statements were true to a certain extent. Jacob had withheld a few of the details about the watering arrangements. Truly if God had not put this plan into Jacob's mind, he would not have been able to do this. We do know that God promised Jacob that He would bless him, and certainly He did.

As we said before, even Laban was blessed in the overflow. Truly, only God could arrange for these animals to be born with these markings. So in these areas, this statement was true. Jacob was trying to justify his actions to his wives as well.

Verses 10-12 (see notes on 30:37-42).

Genesis 31:10 "And it came to pass at the time that the cattle conceived, that I lifted up mine eyes, and saw in a dream, and, behold, the rams which leaped upon the cattle [were] ringstraked, speckled, and grisled."

"And it came to pass, at the time that the cattle conceived": Whether in spring or in autumn cannot be said, for it seems this was twice a year; this probably was at the beginning of the six years' servitude, or just before the agreement was made between Laban and Jacob, and was an instruction to the latter how to make his bargain with the former.

"That I lifted up mine eyes, and saw in a dream": In a vision of the night, so things were represented to his fancy and imagination.

"And, behold, the rams which leaped upon the cattle were ringstraked, speckled, and grisled": From whence he might conclude, that the cattle they leaped upon would bring forth the like, and so be a direction to him to make his agreement with Laban to have such for his hire. Not that the rams in the flock were really of those colors, for they were all white.

But so they were represented to Jacob in the vision, to suggest to him, that such would be produced by them; and it is not improbable by the artifice Jacob was directed to, and took, that the ewes, when they came to the watering troughs to drink, upon seeing the party colored rods in the water, these made such an impression upon their imaginations, that they fancied the rams that leaped upon them were of those colors, and so conceived and brought forth the like.

Here is another color mentioned, not taken notice of before, at least by this name, "grisled"; it stands in the place of "spotted", and seems to be the same with that, and signified such as had spots on them like hailstones, and distinguishes them from the speckled: the speckled were such as were white with black spots, these such as were black, and had white spots like hail.

Genesis 31:11 "And the angel of God spake unto me in a dream, [saying], Jacob: And I said, Here [am] I."

And the Angel of God spake unto me in a dream": In the same dream before related, and to direct him to observe what was presented to him, and to confirm what he saw, and lead him to the design and use of it. (21:17). The same as the Angel of the Lord (16:11; 22:11, 15; see note on Exodus 3:2).

This was not a created angel, but the eternal one, the Son of God, and who is afterwards called God, and to whom Jacob had made a vow, which he would never have done to an angel; but to God only, as Ben Melech observes.

"Saying, Jacob; and I said, here am I": The Angel called him by his name, to which he answered, and signified that he was ready to attend to whatsoever he should say to him.

Genesis 31:12 "And he said, Lift up now thine eyes, and see, all the rams which leap upon the cattle [are] ringstraked, speckled, and grised: for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee."

"And he said, lift up now thine eyes, and see": This was all visionary, Jacob was still in a dream; but it was so impressed upon his mind, that he was spoke to, and bid to observe, and take notice, as follows.

"All the rams that leap upon the cattle are ringstraked, speckled, and grised": Thereby assuring him, that such would be those the ewes would bring forth, which would be right in him to agree with Laban for as his hire; and it is probable that there was some distance of time, at least a night, between the first motion of Laban's to Jacob to settle his wages (Genesis 30:28).

His repeating that, and being urgent to have it done (Genesis 31:31); and in this interval of time might be the night Jacob had this dream and vision in, for his direction. Or if it was after the bargain made, since it is said to be at the time the cattle conceived, he had it to assure him of God's endorsement of it, and of his success in it.

For I have seen all that Laban doeth to thee": Had took notice how he had made him serve fourteen years for his wives, and had given him nothing for his service. How he now was taking advantage of Jacob's modesty to get him to fix his own wages, which he supposed would be lower than he could have the face to offer him.

Genesis 31:13 "I [am] the God of Beth-el, where thou anointedst the pillar, [and] where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred."

"I am the God of Beth-el": The Angel of God (verse 11), clearly identified Himself as the Lord, pointing back as He did so to the earlier critical encounter with God in Jacob's life (28:10-22).

The same Angel that appeared to Jacob in a dream, at the beginning of his six years' servitude, now appeared to him at the close of it, declaring himself to be the God of Beth-el; or that God that manifested himself to him at Beth-el, as Onkelos and Jonathan paraphrase the words.

For this is a distinct vision from that in the preceding verses, concerning the rams of different colors, and are both put together for the sake of brevity, and because they belong to the same affair.

"Where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me" (see Gen. 28:19-20). Hereby signifying the divine approval of the name Jacob gave to that place, and of what he did in it, and to put him in mind of his promise there made.

"Now arise, get thee out from this land": Of Mesopotamia, or Syria, and out of Haran, a city there, where Jacob now was, and Laban lived.

"And return unto the land of thy kindred": To the land of Canaan, the place of his birth, and where his relations dwelt. This shows, that this appearance of God to him, as the God of Beth-el, was at the close of his six years' service.

Finally it is out, Jacob had been instructed of God to leave this land and return to the land of his family. God had shown Jacob in a dream how to increase his flock. God was angry with Laban. God reminded Jacob of the oath he had made at Bethel. Jacob was explaining to his wives, so there would be no trouble about them leaving their homeland.

Verses 14-16: The two wives concurred that, in the context of severely strained family relationships, their inheritance might be in question since the ties that bind no longer held them there. They also agreed that God's intervention had, in effect, returned what their father had wrongfully withheld and spent.

Genesis 31:14 "And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, [Is there] yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house?"

"And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him": One after another, and their answers agreeing, are both put together. It may be Rachel answered in the name of Leah, and for herself, since she is mentioned first, and the verb is singular. The Targum of Jonathan says, Rachel answered with the consent of Leah.

"Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house?" It was what might have been justly expected, as they were his children that they should have been used as such, and have had children's portions given them.

But by the whole of Laban's attitude towards them, both at their marriage, and ever since, it was plain he never intended to give them anything; but kept all he had to himself. Or designed it for his sons, and therefore it was in vain for them to hope for anything.

Signifying to Jacob hereby, that they were willing to leave their father's house, and go with him when he pleased, since they could expect nothing by their stay here.

Genesis 31:15 "Are we not counted of him strangers? for he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money."

"Are we not accounted of him strangers?" He had not treated them as children, nor even as freeborn persons; but as if they were foreigners that he had taken in war, or bought of others. Or at least, that they were born bondmaids in his house, and so had a right to sell them as he had.

"For he hath sold us": He had sold them to Jacob for fourteen years' service, as if they had been his slaves, instead of giving dowries with them as his children.

"And hath quite devoured also our money": That which he got by the servitude of Jacob, instead of giving it to them as their portion; he spent it on himself and his sons, and there was nothing left for them.

Genesis 31:16 For all the riches which God hath taken from our father, that [is] ours, and our children's: now then, whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do."

"For all the riches which God hath taken from our father": And given to Jacob for his labor.

"That is ours, and our children's": it belonged to us by the law of nature, before it came into thine hands; and our right unto it is still more manifest, and is confirmed by the service thou hast done for it, by which means it came into thy possession. Therefore, it is no point of conscience with us, nor need it be any with thee especially, to go off with it.

"Now then, whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do": For that must be right. This was well spoken indeed; they meant that he should leave their father's house, and go into the land of Canaan, as God had directed him; and they signified that they were willing to go along with him.

Here his wives were giving Jacob 100% support. They explained that their father had sold them to Jacob. They belonged to Jacob. Their father had taken for himself everything that he had acquired through them. He had not shared at all with them.

They even went so far as to say, that the riches did not belong to their father Laban, but to them. They believed that it was correct that God had taken their worth from their father and gave it to their husband.

Genesis 31:17 "Then Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives upon camels;"

"Then Jacob rose up": And went with them to Laban's house, where his children were, as is plain from Rachel's theft (Genesis 31:19).

"And set his sons and his wives upon camels": Which were his own (see Genesis 30:43); creatures fit for travelling; on these he set his wives, Rachel and Leah, and his concubine wives, Bilhah and Zilpah; for these went with him, as appears from (Genesis 33:6).

And "his sons", or rather "his children": for they were not all sons, there was one daughter, and they were all young; his eldest son Reuben could not be much more than twelve years of age, and his youngest son Joseph about six.

Genesis 31:18 "And he carried away all his cattle, and all his goods which he had gotten, the cattle of his getting, which he had gotten in Padan-aram, for to go to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan."

"And he carried away all his cattle": His sheep, camels, and asses: the Jews say he had 5,500 head of cattle.

"And all the goods which he had gotten": All the rest besides his cattle; his menservants, and maidservants, and all his gold and his silver, and whatsoever else he had.

"The cattle of his getting, which he had gotten in Padan-aram": Or Mesopotamia: this seems to be purposely observed, to show that he took nothing but what was his own, not anything that belonged to Laban.

"For to go to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan": But it was some years before he got to his father's house, staying at several places by the way. No mention is made of his mother Rebekah, she perhaps being dead by now.

He slipped away unknowingly to Laban. He probably thought Laban would give him some trouble about leaving, or would try to talk him out of leaving. There might have been a fight, and Jacob did not want to fight the father of his wives.

He just slipped away to keep down trouble. Canaan always had a call on men of God. This would someday be inhabited by their ancestors. It was the Promised Land.

Genesis 31:19 "And Laban went to shear his sheep: and Rachel had stolen the images that [were] her father's."

"And Laban went to shear his sheep": Which were under the care of his sons, and were three days' distance from Jacob's flocks; this gave Jacob a fair opportunity to depart with his family and substance, since Laban and his sons were at such a distance, and their servants with them also.

"And Rachel had stolen the images that were her father's": Afterwards called gods, which he made use of in an idolatrous and superstitious manner, one way or other: they seem to be a kind of "penates", or household gods. In the Hebrew they are called "teraphim" (see 2 Kings 23:24; Ezek. 21:21).

These images or figurines of varying sizes, usually of nude goddesses with accentuated sexual features, either signaled special protection for, inheritance rights for, or guaranteed fertility for the bearer.

One would think she had been better instructed by Jacob during his twenty years' conversation with her. Besides, had she been filled with such sort of superstition and idolatry, she would never have used them so indecently, as to have sat upon them in the circumstances in which she was (Genesis 31:34).

It is more to her credit and character to say with Jarchi, that she did this to wean her father from the idolatrous worship of them, and to convince him that they were not gods.

Or, perhaps possession by Rachel would call for Jacob to be recognized as head of the household at Laban's death (see notes on verses 30, 44).

It is a terrible sin to steal, but worse than that was the fact that Rachel had brought a false god along. This was the first mention that Laban was an idolater. It's no wonder God allowed him to lose so many animals to Jacob. Here again though, this would kindle God's anger at Rachel.

Genesis 31:20 "And Jacob stole away unawares to Laban the Syrian, in that he told him not that he fled."

"Jacob stole away unawares to Laban": Went away without his knowledge, or giving him any notice of it. He was too cunning for Laban the Syrian; notwithstanding his astrology and superstitious arts, which the Syrians are addicted to, he had no foresight of this matter.

Or he "stole away the heart of Laban", that which his heart was set upon. Not his gods, these Rachel stole away; nor his daughters, for whom he does not appear to have had any great affection and respect.

But rather the cattle and goods Jacob took with him, which Laban's eye and heart were upon, and hoped to get into his possession by one means or another. But the former sense, that he "stole from" his heart, or stole away without his knowledge, seems best to agree with what follows.

"In that he told him not that he fled": Or that he designed to go away, and was about to do it.

Because of fear at what Laban might do (verse 31), Jacob dispensed with the expected courtesy he had not forgotten before (30:25), and quietly slipped away at an appropriate time (verse 19).

With all his entourage, this was not a simple exit. Laban's gruffness (verses 1-2), displayed enough hostility for Jacob to suspect forceful retaliation and to react by escaping what danger he could not know for sure.

Genesis 31:21 "So he fled with all that he had; and he rose up, and passed over the river, and set his face [toward] the mount Gilead."

"So he fled with all that he had": His wives, his children, cattle and all his possessions.

"And he rose up, and passed over the river": The River Euphrates, as the Targum of Jonathan expresses it, which lay between Mesopotamia and Canaan. The area that is south of Galilee to the east of the Jordan River respectively.

"And set his face toward the mount Gilead": He travelled and bent his course that way: this, was a mountain on the border of the land of Canaan, adjoining to Lebanon, near which was a very fruitful country, which had its name from it.

It is so called here by way of anticipation; for this name was afterwards given it from the heap of stones here laid, as a witness of the agreement between Laban and Jacob (Genesis 31:45).

This mount was the way home to Canaan. It's near the Sea of Galilee on one side near Jordan.

Genesis 31:22 "And it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob was fled."

"And it was told Laban on the third day, that Jacob was fled": Three days after Jacob was gone he had the report of it, by some means or another. By some of his neighbors, or servants left at home. Sooner he could not have known it, since the flock he went to shear was three days' distance from Jacob's (Genesis 30:36).

You remember in our last study, how vast an area this was that they lived in. Jacob wasn't missed sooner, because his cattle were set a great distance away from Laban's. They had a good head start.

Genesis 31:23 "And he took his brethren with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey; and they overtook him in the mount Gilead."

"Seven days' journey": That it took so long for Laban's band to catch up with a much larger group burdened with possessions and animals indicates a forced march was undertaken by Jacob's people, probably motivated by Jacob's fear.

Figured, not from Jacob's departure from Haran, but from Laban's. For Laban being three days' journey from thence, whither he had to return, after he received the news of Jacob being gone.

Jacob must have travelled six days before Laban set out with his brethren from Haran; so that this was, as Ben Gerson conjectures, the thirteenth day of Jacob's travel; for Laban not having cattle to drive as Jacob, could travel as fast again as he, and do that in seven days which took Jacob thirteen. And they overtook him in the mount Gilead; said to be three hundred and eighty miles from Haran

Laban wasn't accompanied by animals that he had to wait for, so he caught them at the mountain.

Genesis 31:24 "And God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said unto him, Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad."

"Take heed ... either good or bad": God again sovereignly protected, as He had done for Abraham and Isaac (12:17-20; 20:3-7; 26:8-11), to prevent harm coming to His man.

In a proverbial expression (Gen. 24:50; 2 Sam. 13:22), Laban is cautioned not to use anything in the full range of options open to him, "from the good to the bad," to alter the existing situation and bring Jacob back.

This answered the question; does God ever speak to the unsaved? Yes, he does. His speaking to Laban was to save Jacob.

Genesis 31:25 "Then Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mount: and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mount of Gilead."

"Then Laban overtook Jacob": He was come to the mount the overnight, but now in the morning he came nearer to him, so as to hold a conversation with him.

"Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mount, and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mount of Gilead": Both on the same mount; One perhaps at the bottom, and the other at the top; or one on one hill of it, and the other on another, or right over against one another.

Genesis 31:26 "And Laban said to Jacob, What hast thou done, that thou hast stolen away unawares to me, and carried away my daughters, as captives [taken] with the sword?"

"And Laban said unto Jacob": Upon their meeting together; perhaps in some middle place between their two tents.

"What hast thou done?" What evil hast thou committed? What folly art thou guilty of? And what could induce thee to take such a step as this? Suggesting that he could see no necessity for it and as if he had done nothing that should occasion it, that Jacob had done a very ill thing.

"That thou hast stolen away unawares to me" (see Gen. 31:20).

"My daughter, as captives": Laban evidently did not believe that his daughters could have possibly agreed with the departure and must have left under duress.

"And carried away my daughters, as captives taken with the sword?" as were commonly done by a band of robbers that made incursions upon their neighbors, and plundered them of their substance, and carried away by force their wives and daughters.

And such a one Laban represents Jacob to be, both a thief and a robber; who had not only stolen away from him, but had stolen away his goods, and even his gods, and carried away his daughters against their will. All which were false, and particularly the latter, since they went along with him with their free and full consent.

Verses 27-29: Laban's questions protested his right to have arranged a proper send-off for his family and functioned as a rebuke of Jacob's thoughtlessness toward him.

Genesis 31:27 "Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly, and steal away from me; and didst not tell me, that I might have sent thee away with mirth, and with songs, with tabret, and with harp?"

"Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly, and steal away from me?": Intimating as if he should not have been against his departure, if he had but acquainted him with it, and the reasons of it. So that he had no need to have used such privacy, and go away like a thief by stealth, as if he had done something he had reason to be ashamed of.

"And didst not tell me, that I might have sent thee away with mirth, and with songs, with tabret and with harp": pretending that he would have given him leave to depart.

And not only have dismissed him from his house and service in an honorable way, but very cheerfully and pleasantly. He would have got a band of music, men singers and women singers, and others to play on musical instruments, as the tabret and harp.

And so had a concert of vocal and instrumental music, which would have shown that they parted by consent, and as good friends: whether this was an usual custom in this country, of parting with friends, I cannot say, but it seems to be very odd; for usually relations and friends, that have a cordial affection for each other, part with grief and tears.

By this Laban appears to be a carnal man, and had but little sense of religion, as well as acted the hypocritical part.

Laban had forgotten that he sold his daughters to Jacob. He had no rights to them anymore. He said he would have thrown a big party for their leaving, if they had only let him know. Would he really, or would he have tried to stop them?

Genesis 31:28 "And hast not suffered me to kiss my sons and my daughters? thou hast now done foolishly in [so] doing."

"And hast not suffered me to kiss my sons and my daughters?" Did not give him an opportunity of taking his farewell, which used to be done with a kiss, as it is with us at this day. By his sons he means his grandsons, and so the Targum of Jonathan, my daughters' sons; and by his daughters Rachel and Leah, and Dinah his granddaughter.

"Thou hast done foolishly in so doing": Since, as he would have him believe that he was both a loser by this step he took, and exposed himself to danger, seeing it was in the power of Laban to do him hurt (as in Genesis 31:29). But Jacob knew what he did, and that it was the wisest part to follow the direction of God.

Genesis 31:29 "It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt: but the God of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad."

"It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt": Jacob and his family, wives, children, and servants, who were not able to stand against Laban and the men he brought with him; and so the Jerusalem Targum paraphrases it, "I have an army and a multitude; a large force, which Jacob could not withstand.

Or, "my hand could have been for a god", you could have no more escaped it, or got out of it, or withstood me, than you could God himself: such an opinion had he of his superior power and strength, and that this would have been the case.

"But the God of your father spoke unto me yesternight": The night past, or the other night, some very little time ago, since he came from home at least: by his father he means either his father Isaac, or his grandfather Abraham, whose God the Lord was, and who came to Laban and told him who he was.

This serves to strengthen the opinion that Laban was an idolater, and adhered to the gods of his grandfather Terah, from whom Abraham departed, and which Laban may have respect to; intimating that he abode by the religion of his ancestors more so than Jacob's.

However, though he does not call him his God, he had some awe and reverence of him, and was influenced by his speech to him.

"Saying, take heed that thou spake not to Jacob either good or bad": This, though greatly to Jacob's honor, and against Laban's interest, yet his conscience would not allow him to keep it a secret; though, doubtless, his view was to show his superior power to Jacob, had he not been restrained by Jacob's God.

Genesis 31:30 "And now, [though] thou wouldest needs be gone, because thou sore longedst after thy father's house, [yet] wherefore hast thou stolen my gods?"

"Wherefore hast thou stolen my gods": Longing to return to Canaan (30:25), might excuse his leaving without notice, but it could not excuse the theft of his teraphim (31:19). Laban's thorough search for these idols (verses 33-35), also marked how important they were to him as a pagan worshiper (see notes on verses 19, 44).

Laban was putting up a good argument. He was telling the truth that he would have harmed Jacob, if God had never intervened. Notice, he called God, Jacob's God, not his. Laban worshipped idols made with hands. Laban said, even if you have to go, why did you steal my gods? A good question. Jacob had no need for this; his God was not made by human hands.

Genesis 31:31 "And Jacob answered and said to Laban, Because I was afraid: for I said, Peradventure thou wouldest take by force thy daughters from me."

"And Jacob answered and said to Laban, because I was afraid": That he would have done all he could to have hindered him from going away himself; and not only so, but would have prevented his taking his daughters with him; and especially would have detained his cattle; but of this last Jacob makes no mention, only of the former.

A reasonable fear is experienced by Jacob, who had come to find a wife and stayed for at least 20 years (verse 38), under the selfish compulsions of Laban.

"For I said": Either within himself, or to his wives.

"Peradventure thou would take by force thy daughters from me": Which of right belonged to him; for though they were Laban's daughters, they were Jacob's wives; and being given in marriage to him, he had a right unto them, and to take them with him.

Nor had Laban any right to detain them, which Jacob feared he would have attempted to have done had he known his design. And this must have been done by force if done at all; for neither Jacob nor his wives would have agreed that they should stay with Laban upon his departure.

What Laban charges Jacob with, in going away with his wives; he himself would have done, namely, using force to them. Laban's charge was false, but there was much reason for Jacob's suspicion.

Jacob realized the treachery of Laban. He knew even though Laban had been fully paid for his daughters, Laban would try to take them back and all the goods with them. Laban was not an honorable man.

Genesis Chapter 31 Questions

1. Who did Jacob overhear talking about him?
2. What are they saying?
3. What sin had overcome them?
4. Were they grateful for the blessings God had given Laban, because of Jacob?
5. What did Jacob see about Laban that worried him?
6. What did the lord tell Jacob to do?
7. Who did Jacob call to the field?
8. Why?
9. What did Jacob remind his two wives of, concerning Laban?
10. Why did Jacob explain in detail to his wives?
11. Jacob told them their father had done what to him?
12. What had God done to their father?
13. How had God given Jacob the plan?
14. God told Jacob he was the God of where?
15. What had Jacob done at this place?
16. What had Jacob been instructed of God to do?

17. What did Rachel and Leah say about their father's treatment?
18. Who did Laban's riches really belong to?
19. What did the wives ride on to leave?
20. What else did Jacob take besides his family?
21. Where was he to go?
22. What was this land really?
23. What evil thing did Rachel do?
24. What was worse than this?
25. What country was Laban from?
26. Jacob set his face toward what mount?
27. When was Laban told that they were gone?
28. How many days did Laban follow?
29. How did God appear to Laban?
30. What did God tell him?
31. What did Laban tell Jacob?
32. What would he have done to Jacob, if God had not warned him?
33. What did Laban accuse Jacob of stealing?
34. Why had Jacob fled?