

Genesis Chapter 31 - Commentary By Mike Wells

Chapter 31 Overview:

Overview of Genesis 31: We continue to read about the life of Jacob. After working for Laban for twenty years, Jacob determined to return to his homeland. This chapter covers the events surrounding his departure from Laban such as: (1) Jacob's secret departure from Laban in verses 1-21. (2) Laban's pursuit of Jacob in verses 23-35. (3) Jacob's complaint of Laban's conduct in verses 36-42. (4) And finally, the covenant between Jacob and Laban at Galeed in verses 43-55.

Genesis 31 : 1-2 - 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. 2 And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before.*

- Jacob's scheme was working, in fact it was really working too well.
- He overheard his brother-in-laws talking about how he was cheating their father.
- He also noticed that Laban was no longer happy with him.

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.*

- The Lord spoke to Jacob, most likely in a dream (see verse 11) to “*return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.*”
- When it came time to move, God prepared circumstances which made it easy for Jacob to leave.
- When we do things in the will of God, he always prepares the way!!
- He had been making good money at Haran, but now God directed him elsewhere.

Genesis 31 : 4-10 - 4 *And Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field unto his flock, 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. 6 And ye know that with all my power I have served your father. 7 And your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times; but God suffered him not to hurt me. 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. 9 Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me. 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.*

- So, Jacob sat down with his two wives and explained to them his plans.
- He probably exaggerated a little bit for their sakes noting that he had served their father with all his power and that the God of his father had been with him.
- He also reminded them that Laban had changed his wages ten times.
- The first year Laban had been pleased with how Jacob was increasing both their flocks.
- But he then noticed that Jacob was prospering more than he was.

- If sheep have lambs twice a year in that climate, then over the next five years, there would have been ten groups of lambs born. (The reference to *cattle* in verse 8 actually refers to flocks of sheep.)
- As each group of lambs was born, Laban changed the agreement.
- If the flock bore speckled this time, then he announced that in the next group, Jacob could have the ringstraked the next time.
- This apparently happened ten times leading up to the events in chapter 31.

Genesis 31 : 11-13 - 11 *And the angel of God spake unto me in a dream, saying, Jacob: And I said, Here am I. 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. 13 I am the God of Bethel, 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.*

- Jacob told his wives that God had spoken to him in a dream reminding him that it was He who had made Jacob prosper. (Not his silly tatics)
- He also reminded Jacob that He was “*the God of Bethel*” where Jacob twenty years earlier had built an altar, having seen the vision of the ladder reaching to heaven. (Jacob’s ladder)
- God then told him to “*arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred.*”

Genesis 31 : 14-16 - 14 *And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father’s house? 15 Are we not counted of him strangers? for he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money. 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.*

- His wives were concerned that in leaving their father, would they receive any inheritance?
- They feared being viewed as strangers or foreigners.
- Then they concluded that the material wealth which they had accumulated at their father’s expense, God in fact had given to them and their children.
- So, they encouraged Jacob, “*Now then, whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do.*”
- It surely is easier to do God’s will when a spouse is in agreement.
- Maybe, God had also worked in their hearts to encourage Jacob to proceed.

Genesis 31 : 17-18 - 17 *Then Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives upon camels; 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 Padanaram, for to go to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan.*

- So, Jacob set his family on camels, herded his flocks, and departed to Canaan land.
- He had a large entourage and must have been slow in moving.
- Laban certainly would soon catch up with them.

Genesis 31 : 19-24 - And Laban went to shear his sheep: and Rachel had stolen the images that were her father's. 20 And Jacob stole away unawares to Laban the Syrian, in that he told him not that he fled. 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. 22 And it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob was fled. 23 And he took his brethren with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey; and they overtook him in the mount Gilead. 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.

- Meanwhile, while leaving, Rachel had stolen her father's images.
- The images likely were made of silver or gold containing her father's image on them.
- These images not only reflected the idolatry of her family, but also was a way for a family to conveniently store its wealth.
- Laban apparently had 'invested' in them as a means of savings for the future.
- They in effect were an investment or a savings device in their gold or silver.
- Rachel knew that.
- Her taking them was was devious.
- She wanted some of her father's inheritance.
- Three days passed, and Laban discovered both his images were missing and Jacob was gone.
- So, he pursued after Jacob and his slow-moving entourage.
- After seven days of pursuit (ten days after Jacob had departed), Laban caught up with him in mount Gilead.
- However, God appeared to Laban the night before and warned him, "***Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad.***"
- In effect, God had warned Laban not to harm Jacob.
- Yet at the same time, God did not want Jacob to return to Haran, hence the command not to speak good to him either.

Genesis 31 : 25-30 - 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. 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? 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? 28 And hast not suffered me to kiss my sons and my daughters? thou hast now done foolishly in so doing. 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. 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?

- Laban was hot.
- He angrily confronted Jacob and demanded to know why he had (1) sneaked away with his daughters; (2) had not allowed a going-away celebration; (3) and had stolen his gods.

Genesis 31 : 31-35 - *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. 32 With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, let him not live: before our brethren discern thou what is thine with me, and take it to thee. For Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them. 33 And Laban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the two maidservants' tents; but he found them not. Then went he out of Leah's tent, and entered into Rachel's tent. 34 Now Rachel had taken the images, and put them in the camel's furniture, and sat upon them. And Laban searched all the tent, but found them not. 35 And she said to her father, Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise up before thee; for the custom of women is upon me. And he searched, but found not the images.*

- Jacob replied, he had left because he was afraid Laban would “*take by force thy daughters from me.*”
- He told Laban to tell him what was his and then take it.
- He also told Laban, with whoever he found stolen the gods, “*let him not live.*”
- He didn't know what Rachel had done.
- Laban searched through Jacob's stuff and could not find the gods.
- In coming to Rachel and her tent, she told her father it was her menstrual period.
- It was customary that in even touching a menstrual woman or even anything she sat on during this time would cause one to be unclean.
- So, Laban didn't look in camel's furniture that she sat on where the golden images were.
- He never found the images.

Genesis 31 : 36-42 - *36 And Jacob was wroth, and chode with Laban: and Jacob answered and said to Laban, What is my tres- pass? what is my sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after me? 37 Whereas thou hast searched all my stuff, what hast thou found of all thy household stuff? set it here before my brethren and thy brethren, that they may judge betwixt us both. 38 This twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. 39 That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night. 40 Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes. 41 Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times. 42 Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight.*

- Now, Jacob was ticked.
- All the frustration and bitterness of the past twenty years spilled out in a bitter confrontation with Laban.
- He challenged Laban to produce anything they had stolen.
- He then angrily reminded Laban that for the past twenty years he had served him in good times and in bad.
- Jacob also reminded Laban that he had changed his wages ten times.

- Jacob the supplanter had received of his own medicine. (Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.)
- In addition, he reminded Laban that “*except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty.*”
- Jacob even told Laban that God had rebuked him the night before in appearing unto him.

Genesis 31 : 43-53 - *43 And Laban answered and said unto Jacob, These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and these cattle are my cattle, and all that thou seest is mine: and what can I do this day unto these my daughters, or unto their children which they have born? 44 Now therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee. 45 And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. 46 And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones; and they took stones, and made an heap: and they did eat there upon the heap. 47 And Laban called it Jegarsahadutha: but Jacob called it Galeed. 48 And Laban said, This heap is a witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed; 49 And Mizpah; for he said, The LORD watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another. 50 If thou shalt afflict my daughters, or if thou shalt take other wives beside my daughters, no man is with us; see, God is witness betwixt me and thee. 51 And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold this pillar, which I have cast betwixt me and thee; 52 This heap be witness, and this pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm. 53 The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob sware by the fear of his father Isaac.*

- The emotions of Jacob and Laban had both been now been vented.
- The air had been cleared.
- Laban knew in his heart that this was his family, his daughters, and his grandchildren.
- So, he proposed a covenant between them to be manifested by a pile of stones.
- Both Jacob and Laban therefore made a pile (i.e., a **heap**) of stones as a witness between them.
- Laban called it *Jegar-sahadutha* which is Syrian for a **heap of witness**.
- Jacob called it *Galeed* which is Hebrew for the same.
- Laban added, *Mizpah* which is Hebrew meaning ‘*a watchtower*.’
- He invoked “*the Lord (to) watch between me and thee, when we are absent from another.*”
- Laban had called God to witness and to watch if Jacob should in any wise disabuse his daughters.
- Laban proposed that the **heap (pile)** of stones would mark a boundary in which he would not pass over to harm Jacob and Jacob would do him no harm.
- Laban also proposed that “*the God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us.*”
- Jacob agreed and “*sware by the fear of his father Isaac.*”

Genesis 31 : 54-55 - *54 Then Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mount. 55 And early in the*

morning Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them: and Laban departed, and returned unto his place.

- Jacob offered a sacrifice to Jehovah God on mount Gilead.
- Then, both he and Laban sat down and ate together and fellowshiped most of the night.
- In the morning, they rose, Laban kissed his daughters and grandchildren, departed, and returned to his place (i.e., home).