

# Genesis

**Memorize the TRUTH!**

**Lesson 17**  
**God Protects Jacob**  
**Genesis 31**

**In you I trust, O my God.  
Do not let me be put to shame, nor let  
my enemies triumph over me.**  
**Psalm 25:2**

## **Time to Go Home – Genesis 31:1-16**

- Day 1**
- a. What caused Jacob to want to return to Canaan?  
  
b. How did God affirm his desire to leave?
  - a. How did Leah and Rachel respond to Jacob's complaints?  
  
b. Has God ever made you unhappy or uncomfortable in your circumstances to prompt you to move where He wanted you to go?

## **Learn the TRUTH!**



Jacob had to learn to stop scheming and start trusting. God wants us to do His will His way, even if the way we have figured out seems safer and easier. He promises His people that if they cry out to Him for help, He will give clear direction. Like Jacob, cry out to God about what He wants you to do, and how He wants you to do it!

## **Fleeing in Secret – Genesis 31:17-21**

## **Day 2**

- a. Why do you think Jacob and his family left Paddan Aram without telling Laban?  
  
b. What emotion often motivated Jacob's actions?  
  
c. If this emotion is a motivating factor in your life, how could Psalm 56:3-4 help you to overcome it?
- What does Rachel's behavior at the time of their departure reveal about her spiritual maturity?

**Caught by Laban**  
**Genesis 31:22-35**

**Day 3**

5. What accusations did Laban make when he caught up with Jacob?
  
6. What real threat to this family did Laban's arrival present?
  
7. a. What had God already done to protect Jacob and his family from Laban?  
  
b. Jacob did not deserve God's protection, but God protected him anyway. What does this tell you about God and His promises?  
  
c. How has God protected you, even when you were partly or wholly responsible for your predicament?

**Jacob's Complaint**  
**Genesis 31:36-42**

**Day 4**

8. Name two wrongs Jacob accused Laban of in this passage.
  
9. To whom did Jacob give credit for the fact that he had prospered?
  
10. a. What lesson do you learn from this passage that can help you deal with unresolved family issues?  
  
b. What warnings did Jesus give about unresolved issues in Matthew 5:21-26?
  
11. What are your responsibilities if someone has done wrong to you? Matthew 18:15-35

**The Witness Stones**  
**Genesis 31:43-55**

**Day 5**

12. a. How did Laban respond to Jacob's accusations? Was he telling the truth?  
  
b. How did Laban propose that he and Jacob resolve their enmity?
  
13. Who did Laban call as his witness should Jacob violate the terms of their agreement?
  
14. What lessons have you learned from Jacob's experiences with Laban?

**Live the TRUTH!**

**The Mizpah blessing, "May the Lord keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other" (Genesis 31:49), is not the warm benediction we pray at the parting of believers. Rather, Laban was warning Jacob to treat his daughters properly because God would be watching. Nevertheless, when we acknowledge God in the middle of our family squabbles, He can bring peace. Let Him be in the center of all our relationships helping us show godly love to each other.**

# Commentary Genesis Lesson 17

As far as his brothers-in-law are concerned, the wealth that Jacob has accumulated is the product of theft. Jacob had arrived in Paddan Aram penniless, while Laban was wealthy; now Jacob is rich, and Laban's wealth is declining; his attitude toward Jacob has become hostile. Jacob's concerns are confirmed by a revelation from God, who tells him to return to Canaan.

Jacob is about to leave, knowing that Laban will disapprove. To determine what his wives wish to do, Jacob calls them both out into the fields, suggesting that he thinks some of the servants in his camp are Laban's spies. He gives his reason for leaving Paddan Aram. Jacob has given honest labor, but Laban is unwilling to see him prosper. God has spoken His mind in the matter by making Jacob wealthy. God could have increased Jacob's wealth while adding to Laban's also, but He had not done this: "God has taken away your father's livestock and has given them to me" (31:9). Jacob's suspicions have been confirmed by a dream. Rachel and Leah have agreed on very little in the last 13 years, but on leaving Haran they are of one mind. They, too, feel estranged from Laban. They have been excluded from their father's estate. As far as Leah and Rachel are concerned, God has been displaying nothing less than simple justice. They encourage Jacob to follow God's directive and return to Canaan.

Jacob and his family leave without announcement. Rachel steals her father's household gods (Hebrew, *teraphim*). These were small idols typically placed in niches in private homes. Rachel may have felt that her theft was justified, because their inheritance rights had been violated. However, she might simply be taking her own private revenge for her father's rejection.

God is not entirely pleased with the manner of Jacob's leaving, although the patriarch is following a divine directive. Moses makes the point that Jacob's departure is nothing less than a deception. The same God who had supported him through 20 years in Laban's employment could protect him and his family as they departed. Instead of leaving on good terms, he flees to Gilead east of the Jordan River. Apparently he plans to stay there for a time and investigate the matter of Esau's hostility before crossing the Jordan. Now, however, instead of having one powerful enemy, he has two.

Laban hears of Jacob's deception two days after his departure. It takes him seven days to overtake Jacob's company, finding him in the hill country of Gilead. God protects Jacob by appearing to Laban in a dream. In the dream, Laban is sternly warned not to "say anything to Jacob, either good or bad" (31:24), but Laban cannot resist rebuking Jacob. He insists that he would have sent Jacob away with a feast and a celebration had he known the patriarch's intent. He acknowledges that God has warned him against harming Jacob. His primary complaint, however, is that Jacob has stolen his gods. Laban is at his core an idolater. Jacob promises to punish the offender and to return any of Laban's property that might be found in his encampment. Rachel deceives her father by hiding the teraphs inside her camel's saddle and then lying to him. Thus Laban, the Mesopotamian con artist, is conned by his own daughter.

## Check It Out:

When a mother eagle wants her babies to learn to fly, she begins to tear the soft lining out of their nest. When God wanted Christ's disciples to leave Jerusalem and spread the good news, He allowed persecution of the church, so they could no longer safely stay there. When He wanted Jacob to return to his father's home, He made sure his position in his uncle's home became unbearable.

God often makes us uncomfortable in order to move us into a new place. Is He trying to move you now — to a new job or to a new area of service? Take the hint!

Laban's pursuit and accusations provoke Jacob to charge him with dishonesty. The patriarch censures Laban for his crooked treatment of his own family. The suppressed bitterness of two decades of hateful treatment bursts forth. Jacob has given Laban 20 years of honest labor, but apart from God's intervention, he would be leaving Haran penniless. Jacob can testify to the greatness and sustaining power of God. The dream that Laban experienced, Jacob insists, is nothing less than a rebuke from heaven itself. Characteristically, Laban remains unrepentant, and even his own daughters regard his behavior as contemptible.

God has restricted Laban from reprisals, so all that remains is to establish a covenant that will define the family's future relationship. The parties to the new treaty do not trust each other, and this relationship will be an uneasy one. The families erect two memorial pillars out of stones. They will serve, in effect, as border markers between their respective domains. Jacob will not travel to the east of the pillars, and Laban will not travel to the west of them. The two men cannot even agree on names for the pillars. Each names his marker in his own tongue. The same monuments were also called — later, perhaps — *Mizpah*, a Hebrew word meaning *watchtower*. Laban calls on two different deities, acknowledging what has become increasingly apparent: He is no true follower of God. Jacob does not swear in this way, instead invoking "the name of the Fear of his father Isaac." The ritual is sealed by sharing a common meal.



**To get to his uncle's home, Jacob left his own home and headed north. It was a long, difficult journey, past the Dead Sea and across a large stretch of desert. There was no guarantee of food and water, and there was the constant danger of bandits as he struck out by himself. He spent 20 years in an increasingly hostile environment and then — with a large contingent of livestock, servants, women, and children — he will soon make it back to his home country. He originally fled from an angry brother; now he flees an angry uncle, knowing his brother is still in the home territory. During those 20 years, God has been transforming Jacob. At first, he made his own decisions and just called on God in emergencies, but in Chapter 31, Jacob invokes God eight times! Jacob finally understands that success is possible only because of what God does on our behalf. Does this story encourage you to believe God will watch over you, your household, and your material possessions?**