

THE LORD MOVES JACOB BACK HOME

TEXT: GENESIS 31:1-55

INTRODUCTION:

1. It was inevitable that eventually Jacob and Laban would have to part company. Laban repeatedly cheated Jacob (31:4-7), and Laban's sons started to murmur against Jacob (31:1, 2).
2. Genesis 30:43 says Jacob "increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses." Laban was envious of Jacob's remarkable success, and his sons even accused Jacob of dishonesty (31:1, 2).
3. Furthermore, it was inevitable that Jacob and Laban would have to part company because Jacob's heart was set on returning home (30:25).
4. In the story of Jacob and Leah and Rachel and Laban, we see much jealousy, and craftiness, and scheming and plotting, and hypocrisy.
5. Yet, in spite of all this, we can also see the hand of God overruling in the life of Jacob and his family (31:3).
6. We can see how marvelously God overruled amid all of the trouble and all of the confusion, and how He fulfilled His purpose of grace for Jacob and his family, his "seed" (cf. 28:13-16).
7. In Padan-aram, God interposed, and He made known His will to Jacob, so that what had been up to this point an intense yearning to go home had now become a plain duty (31:3). Jacob had to leave.
8. Jacob was "commanded to return, and with the command comes the promise of the Divine presence" (W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis*).
9. As we study the life of Jacob, we see that God was undertaking for him constantly. He was always under God's providential watch-care.
10. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "God's providence is indeed the saints' inheritance" (*Genesis*).

I. THE FLIGHT

II. THE PURSUIT

III. THE COVENANT

I. THE FLIGHT

1. Christians sometimes wonder about knowing the will of God. The steps by which Jacob was led to return home provide a practical lesson on discerning God's will.
2. We see here God's method of guidance. First, Jacob had a strong desire to go back home (cf. 30:25, 26).
3. Secondly, circumstances between Jacob and Laban –envy, jealousy, and injustice – began to make it impossible for him to remain.
4. And, thirdly, came God's command (31:3).
5. Thus inward desire, outward circumstances and the Divine word combined to make the pathway clear.
6. Many years ago, F.B. Meyer was sailing from northern Ireland to England. It was nighttime and as he looked ahead all he could see was a confusing jumble of lights. He wondered how the captain would be able to navigate the ship safely into the harbor.
7. So he went and asked the captain. The captain took him up to the bridge and said, "Do you see that big light over to the left? And do you see that other big light to the right of it? And now, do you see that outstanding light farther still this way? Well now, keep your eyes on those three lights and see what happens."
8. As F.B. Meyer watched, the big outer light on the left gradually moved in till it coincided with the middle light. Then as the ship slowly turned, the light gradually merged into the third light.
9. "There now," said the captain, "all I have to do is to see that those three big lights become one; then I go straight ahead."
10. F.B. Meyer saw this as a vivid illustration for discerning the will of God. He said when Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and Divine Providence are lined up we can move straight ahead with confidence, knowing the Lord is directing us.
11. Jacob was being stirred by the Holy Spirit to go home. F.B. Meyer said God was "Stirring up Jacob's Nest." God was moving Jacob back home.
12. Moses said in Deuteronomy 32:11 and 12, "As an eagle stirreth up her nest...So the LORD alone did lead him."
13. God put that desire in Jacob's heart. Secondly, circumstances (Providence) lined up with his yearning to go home. Finally, Jacob had a clear Word from God (31:3).
14. Jacob's next step was to take counsel with his wives. He wanted them to understand they had to leave quickly and quietly because Laban was determined not to let them go (cf. 31:20).

15. Jacob explained to them all the facts, particularly their father's injustice to him, his deception, how he changed Jacob's wages ten times, and all this in spite of Jacob's faithful service for twenty years (31:4-13).
16. Jacob emphasized that God had not left him, and that God had told Jacob to return to the land of his kindred (31:5, 9, 11-13).
17. In his recital Jacob claimed for himself Divine protection and approval, but he acknowledged no consciousness of any wrong-doing of his own.
18. To Jacob it was survival of the fittest. Jacob believed that the end justified the means. Jacob had a long way to go yet before he came to the end of himself. God had to break him (cf. 32:22-32).
19. Laban's daughters entirely sided with Jacob against their own father. They too had experienced their father's deceitfulness and selfishness and greed, and were ready and eager to depart with Jacob (31:14-16).
20. Rachel and Leah were able to discern that God had taken away Laban's riches and had given them to Jacob because it rightfully belonged to them and their children (31:16). They were referring specifically to their dowries, which their father selfishly "devoured" (31:15).
21. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "It is impossible not to regard it as a testimony to Jacob's general faithfulness, so far as the wives had the spiritual discernment to judge of it."
22. Collecting all that he had, Jacob set out on his long journey home (31:17, 18).
23. Laban was out shearing his sheep so it was good time for Jacob and his family to escape (31:19a).
24. Unfortunately, Rachel still retained her attachment to idols and had stolen her father's "images" (31:19).
25. "Images" were *teraphim*, small household gods, used by pagans as good-luck charms, similar to the way Roman Catholics place rosary beads around the rear view mirror of their cars, or put little statues in their front yards, or wear cloth scapulars around their neck, etc.
26. From a Roman Catholic website: "Once you have your scapular blessed by a priest it must be worn at all times in order to share in the indulgences and privileges of the particular scapular. Should you remove the scapular for any period of time you are no longer eligible for its associated blessings, however, as soon as you resume wearing the scapular you are reinvested in its indulgences." What foolishness!
27. Rachel was superstitious and she foolishly believed that her father's idols would bring her good luck on her long journey to Jacob's homeland.

28. Once again we are reminded that it was Rachel, and not Leah, who turned out to be Jacob's greatest hindrance in life. Jacob was wrong to marry Rachel because he was already married to Leah. Time and time again, we see that Leah had a heart for God, but Rachel was worldly.

II. THE PURSUIT

1. After Jacob had been gone for three days, Laban was told what had happened and he took off after him (31:20-23).
2. Laban "took his brethren with him" (31:23), intending to bring back Jacob and his family by force if necessary.
3. Laban and his men overtook Jacob in mount Gilead, about three hundred miles away (31:23). Once again, God interposed on Jacob's behalf and warned Laban in a dream that he was to do Jacob no harm (31:24).
4. This warning from God is a clear proof that Laban intended to do Jacob harm. It is also an indication, that despite Jacob's obvious shortcomings, "right and truth were on the whole with Jacob, and not with Laban" (W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis*).
5. Laban was full of bluster and indignation, and his attitude of injured innocence was a mixture of hypocrisy and exaggeration (31:25, 26).
6. Laban told Jacob he would have liked to have sent them away with a big going-away party, "with mirth, and with songs, with tabret, and with harp" (31:27, 28).
7. This was yet another one of Laban's lies. Laban had had many years of opportunity to show genuine love to his daughters, but in fact he treated them very badly. Laban treated his own daughters like "strangers," and he "devoured" their money. (cf. 31:14, 15).
8. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "His expressions of love for his daughters and grandchildren are either utterly unreal, or else so impulsively emotional as to be practically worthless... Love expressed so late as this cannot be worth much. It is what we are prepared to do for our loved ones while they are with us, not the kind of things we say of them after they are gone, that is the real test and genuine measure of our affection" (*Genesis*).

9. Laban went on to warn Jacob that he had the power to do him harm, but God had spoken to him the night before telling him not to hurt Jacob (31:29).
10. Jacob had good reason to fear Laban, because Laban had demonstrated time and again that he was not trustworthy (cf. 31:31).
11. Notice that Laban refers to God as “the God of your father” (31:29). He was not Laban’s God. Laban was an idolater. His daughter Rachel was sitting on top of his gods (31:30-35).
12. Laban accused Jacob of stealing his idols, but Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them (31:19, 32-35).
13. Since Jacob was unaware that Rachel had stolen Laban’s idols, he asserted his innocence and allowed Laban to search through the tents and look for them.
14. Growing up in Laban’s home, Rachel learned how to be a sneaky dissembler from her father (31:35). It has been well said that she “was a true daughter of her father and a match for him in cunning. But she little knew the trouble she was bringing on Jacob and herself by this deceit” (W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis*).
15. It seems that the religion of Laban, and to a certain extent Rachel too, was a mixture of truth and error, a blending of a belief in the true God with a belief in images.
16. This superstitious use of household gods was widespread in Padan-aram, the area where Laban lived. Joshua said to the Israelites, “And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15).
17. The failure to discover Laban’s idols gave Jacob an opportunity to vindicate himself. “And Jacob was wroth, and chode with Laban...” (31:36, 37).

18. He forcefully recounted all that he had done for Laban, and how Laban had been underhanded and unprincipled, and had changed his wages ten times (31:38-42).
19. Laban's ewes and his she goats have "not cast their young" (not miscarry), and the rams of his flock Jacob did not eat (31:38).
20. Jacob did not bring that which was torn by wild beasts to Laban; he bore the loss of it himself. From Jacob's hand Laban required it, whether the animal was stolen by day or stolen by night (31:39).
21. Jacob worked hard for Laban – through the heat and drought of day, and the cold and frost of night. Oftentimes sleep departed from his eyes (31:40).
22. Laban did not attempt to defend himself because he knew what Jacob said was true, and Laban was not the type of man who would hold his peace if anything Jacob had said wasn't true and factual.
23. Once again, we are reminded that despite his worldly ways, Jacob knew the LORD (31:42).
24. And because Jacob knew the LORD, the LORD protected him and delivered him from his deceitful father-in-law Laban. Jeremiah 15:20 and 21 says, "For I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee, saith the LORD. And I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible."
25. The "fear of Isaac" (31:42, 53) refers to Isaac's fear of God. Jacob was self-willed and worldly-minded, but he did understand the fear of God (cf. 28:16, 17).
26. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10).
27. Jacob said to Laban, "God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight" (Genesis 31:42b).

III. THE COVENANT

1. Laban realized he could no longer control Jacob, and that God was on Jacob's side. Since he knew he could not win, Laban suggested they settle their disagreement with a covenant (31:43, 44).
2. In other words, Laban the deceiver wanted the others to think he was now "Laban the peacemaker."
3. "And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar"(31:45).
4. Next, a heap of stones, "and they did eat there upon the heap" (31:46).
5. Laban called the heap of stones (in Syriac), "Jegarsahadutha" ("the heap of witness"), and Jacob called it "Galeed," which has the exact same meaning in Hebrew (31:47, 48).
6. The pillar was called "Mizpah" ("beacon" or "watch tower"), and symbolized the LORD watching between the two parties to the covenant and keeping guard over the agreement, lest either should break it (31:49). It was a boundary line not to be crossed.
7. Mizpah was a symbol of suspicion. Jacob and Laban called on God, not to ratify their partnership, but to watch over them in order that neither one of them may wrong the other.
8. Jacob and Laban could not trust each other, so they had to make this covenant and set up a monument to mark the spot over which neither of them would cross for the purpose of harming the other.
9. Next, Laban and Jacob made solemn oaths in the name of God, followed by a sacrifice and a customary meal (31:50-54).
10. It is significant that carnal and self-willed Jacob, and crafty and idolatrous Laban both acknowledged the presence of God.
11. Here we are nearly four thousand years later, and many people – even many people who claim to be Christian – act as if God's presence was not real.
12. Hamlet said to his friend Horatio, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, Rough-hew them how we will."
13. We see this repeatedly in the life of Jacob, and we will see it again in Genesis 32, when Jacob says, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (32:30).
14. The meeting in Mount Gilead came to an end, and early the next morning, Laban and his men returned to their home.
15. And Jacob and his household went on their journey to the promised land (31:55)

CONCLUSION:

1. We have seen over and over again the grace of God manifested in the life of Jacob, a man who was crafty and carnal and self-willed.
2. C.H. MacIntosh said, "God was with Jacob, for nothing can hinder the outshinings of divine grace...The more man sinks, the more God's grace rises."
3. Another preacher said, God loved Jacob not because he was good, but God loved Jacob in order that he might make him good by His grace.
4. And God loves us, not because we are good, but God loves us in order that he might make us good by His grace.
5. If we were honest with God today, we would recognize that we are all very much like Jacob, and are all very much in need of God's grace.