

**Title: Jacob's Long Journey Home****Introduction:**

- (Picture of Dorothy's red shoes on screen) Do you know whose feet these are? Does a certain phrase come to mind when you see this photo? (There's no place like home.) (2x) She was desperate to get home, wasn't she? Home is where most of us like to be, or want to be. "Home" is a tricky word. One writer described "home" as "a complicated word, a place, an idea, a refuge, and a quandary." I can relate to that word "quandary". When someone asks me, "Where did you grow up?" I have trouble answering. My life as an Air Force brat put my "home" in 10 different states, some of them more than once. That quandary (which means a puzzling dilemma), has continued in my adult life. With our latest move from Fort Worth to Weatherford, Carole and I have now had 24 mailing addresses in our married life. But the subject of our lesson today had quite a different home situation. As a young adult, Jacob had left his home in the Promised Land and lived in a place far to the east for 26 years. But he knew where his true home was, and he longed to be back there. **(Review Title and Genesis references from screen #1 and top of this page, then move through the following 3 lines.)**

**Theme:** The Lord's protection and provision enable the believer to faithfully persevere.

**I. Preparation for the Journey Home (Gen 30:25-43)**

**A. A new arrangement for Jacob's compensation**

**<sup>25</sup> Now it came about when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my own country. <sup>26</sup> Give *me* my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me depart; for you yourself know my service which I have rendered you."**

- Jacob sounds like a man who is ready to make his own way in the world. And he wants to do it in his own place in his own country. And it wasn't just like Dorothy, wanting to go to the specific house he was living in when he left. Jacob knew that his return would be to a land, a land promised to him through God's covenant with his grandfather Abraham and reaffirmed through his father, Isaac. It was The Promised Land! And it was his land, too!!!

**<sup>27</sup> But Laban said to him, "If now if it pleases you, *stay with me*; I have divined that the LORD has blessed me on your account." <sup>28</sup> He continued, "Name me your wages, and I will give it." <sup>29</sup> But he (Jacob) said to him, "You yourself know how I have served you and how your cattle have fared with me. <sup>30</sup> For you had little before I came and it has increased to a multitude, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. But now, when shall I provide for my own household also?"**

- Laban’s statement in verse 27 is interesting because it describes early religious syncretism. This is the blending of differing systems of religious belief (often contradictory systems) into a new system. Missionaries in India think they have won Hindus to Christ, only to discover that Jesus has merely been added to the impossibly large group of gods they already worship. As Spain’s influence spread throughout Central and South America in the 1500’s through the 1700’s, very strange combinations of Roman Catholicism and animism began to be common. But here with Laban we have a combination of the monotheistic truths that passed from Adam and Eve down through Noah into the Middle Eastern cultures that Laban was a part of. He had concluded that the Lord was at work in blessing him through Jacob, but he had resorted to “divination” to learn that. The Hebrew word for “divination” means “to consult sources with access to supernatural power and information.” (Think of King Saul going to a medium in 1 Samuel 28 when he wanted to talk to the deceased Samuel because the Lord wouldn’t respond to his inquiries.)
- Jacob was the manager of livestock and crop production for Laban, and his work had in fact been blessed by the Lord.
- In the agreed-upon 14 years, Jacob had worked hard, dedicated to Laban’s success, and he had accumulated 2 wives, 2 surrogate mothers, and 12 children (11 boys and 1 girl). But he is ready to be the provider for his family. His problem was that he owned nothing from which to make his own living.

**<sup>31</sup> So [Laban] said, “What shall I give you?” And Jacob said, “You shall not give me anything. If you will do this *one* thing for me, I will again pasture *and* keep your flock: <sup>32</sup> let me pass through your entire flock today, removing from there every speckled and spotted sheep and every black one among the lambs and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and *such* shall be my wages. <sup>33</sup> So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come concerning my wages. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, *if found* with me, will be considered stolen.” <sup>34</sup> Laban said, “Good, let it be according to your word.”**

- So Laban allows Jacob to define his compensation, again. (29:15; 30:31) He offered to give him something. But Jacob wanted no gift, he wanted to be paid for his work. His wages would be to build his own herd from the less desirable of Laban’s flocks, the sheep and goats that weren’t pure white in their wool or hair.
- To Laban, Jacob’s choice was favorable – either the less commonly produced animals, or the less desirable product in the marketplace, so he agreed immediately, Jacob should have been suspicious after the Leah experience. But the deal was sealed in verse 34.

**<sup>35</sup> So [Laban] removed on that day the striped and spotted male goats and all the speckled and spotted female goats, every one with white in it, and all the black ones among the sheep, and gave them into the care of his sons. <sup>36</sup> And he put *a distance of three days’ journey* between himself and Jacob, and Jacob fed the rest of Laban’s flocks. (ESV: [Laban] put them in the charge of his sons.) (RSV: [Laban] put them in charge of his sons.)**

- So here was Laban in action. He probably ran, and beat Jacob out to the pastures where the sheep and goats were. He then pulled out all the ones Jacob would have selected, and told his sons to take them three days away.
- (Note the mildly famous translation error in the last phrase of verse 36. ☺ )
- Laban was a crafty man, figuring out ways to make agreements work to serve his best interests. (No matter whether those ways were ethical or not.) Laban's deception history is impressive – first, Jacob had worked for seven years, at the end of which he had earned the right to marry Rachel. But Laban secretly substituted Leah as the bride at the last minute, requiring Jacob to work another seven years to really and truly marry Rachel. Then seven years later, he planned to render as useless the agreed-upon plan for Jacob's compensation. (No qualifying animals were present in the flocks and herds by the time Jacob got there.)
- We should wonder if Jacob's thoughts about his own deception of his father Isaac ever came to mind when his frustration would build from being the victim in another one of Laban's schemes.

**IMPLICATION:** When I am frustrated or angered by someone else's treatment of me, am I willing to examine my own treatment of others to find possible similarities?

### **B. Jacob tries to be a good steward of what the Lord provides**

**<sup>37</sup> Then Jacob took fresh rods of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white stripes in them, exposing the white which *was* in the rods. <sup>38</sup> He set the rods which he had peeled in front of the flocks in the gutters, *even* in the watering troughs, where the flocks came to drink; and they mated when they came to drink. <sup>39</sup> So the flocks mated by the rods, and the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. <sup>40</sup> Jacob separated the lambs, and made the flocks face toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban; and he put his own herds apart, and did not put them with Laban's flock.**

- Ok, what's going on here? Superstitious animal husbandry? Maybe. But Henry Morris speculates, from a more scientific perspective, regarding a possibility that chemicals from the plants submerged in the water consumed by the animals may have affected the DNA structure of cells involved in reproduction. Others have speculated that the chemicals could have caused an increase in male and female reproductive activity. (Trying to keep my G rating here.) But ultimately, the Lord blessed Jacob with unusually significant growth in the size of his flocks.

**<sup>41</sup> Moreover, whenever the stronger of the flock were mating, Jacob would place the rods in the sight of the flock in the gutters, so that they might mate by the rods; <sup>42</sup> but when the flock was feeble, he did not put *them* in; so the feebler were Laban's and the stronger Jacob's.**

- Here we have some actual knowledge of animal breeding practices being exercised. Strength breeds strength, weakness breeds weakness. We see that the Lord blessed Jacob as he was a good steward of what the Lord was providing.

**<sup>43</sup> So the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys.**

- After a few years, prosperity came – large flocks, hired servants, purchased camels and donkeys. The God of Jacob and his fathers had intervened in marvelous and mysterious ways. Was Jacob thankful to the Lord? (Absolutely – make a note – see Jacob’s prayer in **Genesis 32:9-10**.)
- Finally! Conditions seemed right for Jacob’s departure and return to his homeland! The family was his. The servants were his. He owned sufficient livestock from which to make his own living. Now to me, the logistics of the journey seem overwhelming. Two wives, two surrogate women, 12 children, an unknown number of servants, and large herds of animals. All of the people and all of the animals would need food and water every day, and some form of shelter at night, at least for the people. Jacob had only seen the route once, and that was about 20 years before. Uh-oh, no Google maps lady. Ha! Probably no maps!! The trip would have been about 300 miles, just to get to northern Canaan. But hold on. What about Laban and his sons? What if they physically opposed his plan to leave?

## **II. The Journey Home Begins (Gen 31:1-55)**

### **A. The Escape Plan**

**<sup>1</sup> Now Jacob heard the words of Laban’s sons, saying, “Jacob has taken away all that was our father’s, and from what belonged to our father he has made all this wealth.” <sup>2</sup> Jacob saw the attitude of Laban, and behold, it was not *friendly* toward him as formerly.**

- As Jacob’s flocks are growing, Laban and his sons were growing antagonistic toward Jacob. His sons seemed ready for this outsider to leave. Their envy led them to lie about the situation. Their accusation was that Jacob was stealing all of Laban’s livestock and then using it to become wealthy. This was a lie, because the agreement with Laban was that the livestock were Jacob’s wages for continuing to work for him. Jacob was sensing this as a problem, so he suspected that Laban wouldn’t let him take his flocks with him if he left. (We’ll see this ahead on verse 42)

**IMPLICATION:** Be very careful about envying. It can lead to distorting the truth.

**<sup>3</sup> Then the LORD said to Jacob, “Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.”**

- Notice that the Lord’s instruction was to go back to the land and to his family. And the promise, “I will be with you” would certainly include overcoming any possible trouble with relatives like Esau.
- Emboldened, Jacob summons his two wives to a private, secret meeting. We see his strength of family leadership finally beginning to emerge.

<sup>4</sup> So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to his flock in the field, <sup>5</sup> and said to them, “I see your father’s attitude, that it is not *friendly* toward me as formerly, but the God of my father has been with me. <sup>6</sup> You know that I have served your father with all my strength. <sup>7</sup> Yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times; however, God did not allow him to hurt me. <sup>8</sup> If he spoke thus, ‘The speckled shall be your wages,’ then all the flock brought forth speckled; and if he spoke thus, ‘The striped shall be your wages,’ then all the flock brought forth striped. <sup>9</sup> Thus God has taken away your father’s livestock and given *them* to me. <sup>10</sup> And it came about at the time when the flock were mating that I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the male goats which were mating *were* striped, speckled, and mottled. <sup>11</sup> Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, ‘Jacob,’ and I said, ‘Here I am.’ <sup>12</sup> He said, ‘Lift up now your eyes and see *that* all the male goats which are mating are striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. <sup>13</sup> I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me; now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth.’”

- Jacob presented his perspective on the situation to them: he has been a faithful worker, his conscience is clear, even though Laban has treated him unfairly. But God has helped him overcome this and has now commanded him to leave and return to his homeland. The two women’s response is a bit surprising.

<sup>14</sup> Rachel and Leah said to him, “Do we still have any portion or inheritance in our father’s house? <sup>15</sup> Are we not reckoned by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and has also entirely consumed our purchase price. <sup>16</sup> Surely all the wealth which God has taken away from our father belongs to us and our children; now then, do whatever God has said to you.”

- I want to share some thoughts from Henry Morris on this family meeting. “Jacob told [the two sisters] that their father no longer felt toward him as he formerly did, because of his increasing prosperity... But no matter what Laban had tried to do to him, God had protected and prospered him. During all that time, he had continued to serve Laban to the very best of his ability, trying to keep his own word and to be a good testimony to all concerned. He also knew that Rachel and Leah were aware of this, and that they could hardly fail to have been deeply impressed with the way the Lord was miraculously prospering their husband in spite of all their father could do to prevent it. Jacob made no claim that it was by his own ability or ingenuity that he had acquired such wealth; he gave all the credit to the Lord, as indeed he should have done, because his prosperity was entirely due to the Lord.” Laban was learning what Solomon, years later, would express in Proverbs 19:21, “**Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will be established.**”
- Soon the right moment for action came. Laban was a good distance away, taking care of the sheep shearing.

## B. The Great Escape

**<sup>17</sup> Then Jacob arose and put his children and his wives upon camels; <sup>18</sup> and he drove away all his livestock and all his property which he had gathered, his acquired livestock which he had gathered in Paddan-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac. <sup>19</sup> When Laban had gone to shear his flock, then Rachel stole the household idols that were her father's. <sup>20</sup> And Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him that he was fleeing. <sup>21</sup> So he fled with all that he had; and he arose and crossed the *Euphrates River*, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead.**

- So, the camels were loaded up with the women and children, the servants gathered all the livestock from the pens and fields, and the strange caravan departed. Oh, and don't forget – Laban's household gods came along for the ride.
- It's easy enough to know how the clay or metal figurines came along, Rachel stole them. The question that remains is "Why?" Bible readers have been speculating about the answer to that question for centuries. Was she resentful over the way her father had treated her and her sister, so this could be her payback? Could he possibly use them to discover what route they had taken and thus follow them? Was her superstition hoping they would bring her good luck on a perilous journey? In that culture, such idols were thought to impart fertility to barren women. Could she have another baby if these idols were hers? Were these false gods an important part of her spiritual life in her growing up years? Perhaps your thoughts could contribute some new possibilities. 😊
- This departure is described in the text as "deceitful" in regard to their relationship with Laban. A well-known 20<sup>th</sup> century pastor named Donald Grey Barnhouse called it an example of "sneaking away into the will of God". The Lord had promised to be with Jacob for this journey. Did the fear of Laban and his sons overwhelm his faith? Possibly. But we'll see in a few verses that Jacob's faith had become stronger when Laban and a gang of his male relatives showed up, making the confrontation that Jacob imagined a reality.

**<sup>22</sup> When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled, <sup>23</sup> then he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him *a distance of seven days' journey*, and he overtook him in the hill country of Gilead. <sup>24</sup> God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream of the night and said to him, "Be careful that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad."**

- So Laban and his guys headed out as a kind of old-west posse, and were able to catch up with the alleged thieves. But at the last minute, the Lord confronts Laban to warn him against causing any harm to Jacob he might have in mind. Speaking "good or bad". "Bad" would be Laban telling Jacob that he and his men were going to take everything back to Haran, and that if he and his men resisted they would be met with violence. This intervention calls to remembrance another personal visit back in chapter 20, where the Lord appeared in a dream to warn King Abimelech that he was about to make a really bad decision. The king had believed Abraham's story that Sarah was his sister and was planning to take her as his wife. Both men were wise enough to heed God's warning.

- I like how Henry Morris described the effects of God’s visit to Laban. “God made it plain to him that Jacob was under His protection and was following His directions. Though Laban did not know the Lord in any personal way, he did know enough about Him to know he had better do what [God] said.”

## C. The Great Confrontation

### 1. Laban’s accusations against Jacob

**<sup>25</sup> Laban caught up with Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsmen camped in the hill country of Gilead. <sup>26</sup> Then Laban said to Jacob, “What have you done by deceiving me and carrying away my daughters like captives of the sword? <sup>27</sup> Why did you flee secretly and deceive me, and did not tell me so that I might have sent you away with joy and with songs, with timbrel and with lyre; <sup>28</sup> and did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters? Now you have done foolishly. <sup>29</sup> It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, ‘Be careful not to speak either good or bad to Jacob.’ <sup>30</sup> Now you have indeed gone away because you longed greatly for your father’s house; *but why did you steal my gods?***

- Laban begins a series of accusations. Jacob has deceived Laban by planning a secret escape plan in which he kidnapped his daughters and grandchildren. He calls Jacob a fool for doing this because he, Laban, has the power to do him harm. Murder could even have been in his mind. But God, (Isaac’s God, not Laban’s God), intervened. So Laban seemed to soften at this point in his rant, imagining the celebration they could have had to send Jacob on his way. Really, Laban? But true to character, he deflected any guilt on his part by accusing Jacob of stealing his household gods. Jacob then answered Laban’s first question (**Read verses 27 and 28a again**).

**<sup>31</sup> Then Jacob replied to Laban, “Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force.**

- And then he makes a thoughtless vow, one that could have resulted in a death sentence for Rachel.

**<sup>32</sup> The one with whom you find your gods shall not live; in the presence of our kinsmen point out what is yours among my belongings and take *it* for yourself.” For Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them.**

**IMPLICATION:** It is a foolish act to make a vow when you don’t have all the facts in a situation. Jesus tells us to let our “Yes” be yes and our “No” be no. Jacob should have responded to Laban by just saying that he was not aware of any such act by one of his people, but feel free to search.

- So a full-scale search ensued, but no little gods were found, because, like father like daughter, Rachel was a clever deceiver too.

**<sup>33</sup> So Laban went into Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two maids, but he did not find *them*. Then he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's tent.**

**<sup>34</sup> Now Rachel had taken the household idols and put them in the camel's saddle, and she sat on them. And Laban felt through all the tent but did not find *them*. <sup>35</sup> She said to her father, "Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the manner of women is upon me." So he searched but did not find the household idols.**

- It was customary in that culture for children to rise when their father entered the room, but Rachel successfully avoided suspicion by her clever excuse. It also prevented the saddle from being searched. We can only wonder if she was concerned at all about Jacob's vow that if the thief was discovered in his camp, there would be an execution.
- Now it's Jacob's turn to address the issues, and he does so with righteous anger. He becomes the prosecuting attorney, and Laban becomes the accused defendant.

## **2. Jacob's response to Laban**

**<sup>36</sup> Then Jacob became angry and contended with Laban; and Jacob said to Laban, "What is my transgression? What is my sin that you have hotly pursued me? <sup>37</sup> Though you have felt through all my goods, what have you found of all your household goods? Set *it* here before my kinsmen and your kinsmen, that they may decide between us two. <sup>38</sup> These twenty years I *have been* with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten the rams of your flocks. <sup>39</sup> That which was torn of *beasts* I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it myself. You required it of my hand *whether* stolen by day or stolen by night. <sup>40</sup> Thus I was: by day the heat consumed me and the frost by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. <sup>41</sup> These twenty years I have been in your house; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flock, and you changed my wages ten times. <sup>42</sup> If the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had not been for me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the toil of my hands, so He rendered judgment last night."**

- His conscience is clear and his integrity intact. He had suffered under Laban's devious, unfair treatment for 20 years. If the Lord hadn't been his helper and protector, he would have returned to his homeland owning nothing.
- Laban countered with the final, useless claim that his daughters, their children, and all the animals belonged to him.

**<sup>43</sup> Then Laban replied to Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters, and the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine.**

Then suddenly, unexpectedly, he followed that claim by releasing them from his control and offering a covenant, meant to be a kind of peace treaty. The agreement was to be marked by a monument built of stone.

## D. The Great Agreement

But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne? <sup>44</sup> So now come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me.” <sup>45</sup> Then Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. <sup>46</sup> Jacob said to his kinsmen, “Gather stones.” So they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. <sup>47</sup> Now Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. <sup>48</sup> Laban said, “This heap is a witness between you and me this day.” Therefore it was named Galeed, <sup>49</sup> and Mizpah, for he said, “May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from the other. <sup>50</sup> If you mistreat my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, *although* no man is with us, see, God is witness between you and me.”

- Now verse 49 has been quoted by many people who are about to be apart for a while – good friends or a married couple. **(Read verse 49)** It’s a sweet sentiment. But that’s the trouble with taking verses out of context. Galeed means “the heap of witness” and Mizpah means “watchtower”. Laban was concerned that Jacob would mistreat his daughters, and he wanted Jacob to keep being reminded by the tower that God was watching so as to see (and hopefully punish) any such abusive behavior. But it’s still a nice thought in the proper context.

<sup>51</sup> Laban said to Jacob, “Behold this heap and behold the pillar which I have set between you and me. <sup>52</sup> This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass by this heap to you for harm, and you will not pass by this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. <sup>53</sup> The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us.” So Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. <sup>54</sup> Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his kinsmen to the meal; and they ate the meal and spent the night on the mountain. <sup>55</sup> Early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and his daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place.

- The crisis was over, the covenant process nearly complete. Laban spoke a kind of benediction in verse 53. Sadly, he revealed the monotheistic influence of his ancestry heritage, but we know that his spiritual life had been corrupted by the idol worship of his culture. He made no apology to Jacob for his actions or attitudes. Jacob offered a sacrifice in gratitude to the Lord, and the two groups ate a meal together. The next morning, good-byes were expressed before Laban and his men departed for home.
- Commentator James Montgomery Boice provides an epilogue for us – “This is the last of Laban we hear in the Bible, and it is good that this is the end of him. Laban is of the world, and Jacob needed to be freed from this world in order to live wholeheartedly for the God of his father.”

**IMPLICATION:** No matter what your spiritual heritage from the past looks like, no matter what your walk with God looks like today, there is constant pressure from the world to conform. To conform your values, morals, and priorities into alignment with the world’s values, morals, and priorities. If you yield, you will be walking in the shadow of Jacob’s pagan uncle, Laban. But the Lord calls us to walk in the light, as He is in the light! **(Pray)**