

Jacob Flees From Laban Pt. 2

Jacob's Flight: The View From Heaven

Jacob had entered pagan Mesopotamia with only his staff; “for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan” (Genesis 32:10). A modern way to state this is to say that he arrived only with the clothes on his back. Yet he did not enter alone. He entered Mesopotamia with God and his promises.

The Lord appeared to him during his flight from Esau.

“Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (Genesis 28:15, ESV)

So Jacob his walking stick. He had a staff, but his real staff was the staff of the LORD. The Lord would hold him up. Jacob would enter Mesopotamia to shepherd Laban's flock, but the Great Shepherd would shepherd Jacob.

Therefore, he could say as his descendants would later say and become scripture, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want (not lack anything)...Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” (Psalm 23:1, 4)

That is what Jacob's flight looks like from Heaven. Both Jacob and the LORD will enter Mesopotamia.

Jacob's Plight: The View from Earth

What does Jacob's situation look like on the ground? What does his situation look like in the eyes of faithless men? From the earthly perspective Jacob was certainly disadvantaged and that reality immediately manifests itself through his business dealings with his uncle Laban.

Even though Laban did not own much livestock, it was certainly more than what Jacob owned. Laban owned the livestock, and Jacob owned a staff. As far as Laban was concerned, all Jacob had was a stick! In the beginning, Laban didn't know it was God's stick.

And so Laban, given his poor character, takes advantage of the vulnerable. What could Jacob do? He'd fallen in love with Laban's daughter Rachel who was “beautiful in form and appearance” (Genesis 29:17). He wanted to marry her, but how could he if he could not even offer the customary bride price? Since he did not have possessions, he offered his person. He proposes to Laban, “I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel” (Genesis 29:18). It was a generous offer. It was a high price

to pay, but Jacob was glad to pay the cost. The seven years of service for Rachel “seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her” (Genesis 29:20).

Laban appears to be on the better end of this deal. He preferred for his daughter to marry a relative rather than any other man (Genesis 29:19). He not only gains a familiar son-in-law, but he also secures someone to oversee his flocks for the next seven years. It’s a win-win for Laban. Laban will soon realize that things will get even better for him than they first appear.

Laban did not know at first of the presence of God in Jacob’s life. He saw Jacob’s rod, but he had not seen the LORD’s rod. The LORD’s staff would initially be to Laban’s advantage. The LORD’S rod would be the source of Laban’s increase in wealth, but that the same rod would be to Laban a rod of rebuke for his poor treatment of Jacob.

Jacob’s Plight

So looking at Jacob’s situation from the ground, it does not seem at first that God favors Jacob. It first appears that Laban is the one whom God favors because it is his wealth that increases at Jacob’s expense. Jacob had arrived as a poor man and in his vulnerable state Laban took advantage of him. Jacob gets himself into a 7-year debt and the proverb proves true, “The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender” (Proverbs 22:7). Jacob became Laban’s slave and Laban grew rich. Another proverb says, however that “the sinner’s wealth is laid up for the righteous.” (Proverbs 13:22).

Under Jacob’s oversight Laban’s sheeps and goats multiply and fare better than they ever had before. And in due time, Laban discerns the LORD’s hand upon Jacob. Laban sees Jacob as his lucky charm.

Laban’s 1st Delay of Jacob’s Departure: He Deceives Jacob

Laban’s marriage contract became more lucrative than he had first imagined, but the contract had an expiration date. The contract was for seven years of service. So being the materialist that he was, Laban wanted to amend the contract so as make Jacob stay longer, but how could he accomplish this? He knew from the beginning that Jacob’s stay was not permanent. He knew Jacob’s intentions were to serve seven years, marry Rachel and return home Canaan.

Laban has a few tricks up his sleeve. He comes from a family of cheaters. His own sister Rebekah, Jacob’s mother, had demonstrated this trait also. In fact, she was the reason why Jacob was back in Mesopotamia to begin with! It was her idea for Jacob to deceive Isaac into passing the birth right to him. Jacob is not guiltless either. He not only went along with his mother’s plan, but years early he took advantage of his brother Esau. There was an occasion when Esau came in from the field exhausted and “hangry.” Esau exclaimed that he was going to die if he did not eat. At that hangry moment he cared more for Jacob’s stew rather than his birthright. Jacob, recognizing Esau’s vulnerability, proposed that Esau sell off his birthright in exchange for the stew (Genesis 25:29–32). Esau gave in.

So Jacob's family values (from his mother's side) is what landed him in Mesopotamia with Laban, but the tables had turned. Jacob is the one who was now exhausted and vulnerable and his uncle, being true to the family trait, takes advantage.

Laban anticipating that Jacob would leave after seven years, schemes. It's not so much that he did not want to see his daughter and son-in-law leave. He doesn't want to see the end of the prosperity that Jacob had brought him. Laban cared more about the departure of his prosperity under Jacob's management more than he did about the departure of his daughter with Jacob. He was not going to allow this to happen.

He had seen an opportunity for financial gain slip way before when he was a young man. When Laban was a young man, Abraham's servant came to his home seeking Rebekah to take her back to Isaac as a wife. Abraham's servant had arrived with "ten... camels and...all sorts of choice gifts" (Genesis 24:10).

"Abraham's servant...brought out jewelry of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave to [Laban] and to [his] mother costly ornaments" (Genesis 24:52–53, ESV).

Laban's eyes glistened when he saw the silver and the gold. Laban tried to delay Abraham's servant's departure. Though the Bible does not explicitly say it, given Laban's materialistic character, it isn't a stretch to say that his intentions were to exact more from Abraham's servant during a delayed stay.

"Many seek the favor of a generous man, and everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts." (Proverbs 19:6, ESV)

This would be Laban's strategy with Jacob too. He was not going to allow the agent of his newfound wealth slip away.

Laban Deceives Jacob: He Marries Leah

Jacob completed the seven years of service and Laban throws a wedding party. He goes along with all of the festivities leading Jacob to believe that he was going to deliver on his end of the agreement by giving Rachel's hand in marriage, but Laban had schemed. He doesn't care that he would break Rachel's heart, neither did he care that he would anger and breaks Jacob's heart too. He only cared about himself in not losing the man who was responsible for his newfound wealth. He betrayed both his daughter and his son-in-law, by putting in Leah as a stunt-double! At the last minute, when the wedding party was well under way, the Bible says, "in the evening [Laban] took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob" (Genesis 29:23).

The Bible doesn't give us the details how it was possible for Jacob to take Leah and consummate the marriage and thereby sealing the deal only to discover in the morning that it was Leah and not Rachel who he had been with! Yet, it happened!

In the morning, Jacob discovers the deception and he demands an answer! Laban justifies his deception by appealing to marriage custom. He said, "It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn" (Genesis 29:26). Laban is not an honest man. Given his poor character, I very much doubt his real motive was sympathy for Leah and some kind of noble desire to uphold tradition. If this was really the case, why did he not share this little detail with Jacob from the beginning? Maybe it was in the "fine print."

Why Not Divorce Leah?

Given the poor state of marriage in our own day and how our society thinks very little of God's institution. Marriage is no longer held as sacred. We take our modern poor view of marriage and project these ideas back into the Bible and ask, "Why doesn't Jacob just annul the marriage? Why doesn't he just divorce Leah since that wasn't the arrangement he had? This was clearly a breach of contract!"

Now, granted that Jacob might not be the most morally pure person, but he isn't horrible either. Given the culture at the time and how society viewed women in general, Jacob would have essentially ruined Leah and committed her to lifelong singleness. He would have shamed her. Divorced women had little to no chance of remarriage. To begin with, the Bible says that unlike her sister Rachel who "was beautiful in form and appearance" (Genesis 29:17), "Leah's eyes were weak." This was a contrast of beauty between the two. That her eyes were weak is probably an idiomatic way of saying that she was not attractive. She was not a sought after woman when she was an available bachelorette, much less if she became a divorced woman.

Using artistic license, putting her up to this, I think her dad may have said to her, "Mira, hija. Estas fea. And I think the only way a man will marry you is if we trick him into it. Entonces, quieres a Jacob, oh no?"

In spite of the deception, Jacob does the decent and honorable thing and remains married to Leah, but he still wants Rachel. He loves her. So Laban proposes to Jacob, "Work another seven years, and I'll give you the wife you really wanted" (v. 27).

What can Jacob do? He loves Rachel not Leah, but he's stuck with Leah. Since he loves Rachel that much, he serves another seven and so by using his daughters as pawns, Laban secures for himself another seven years of financial success. He 'd forced Jacob's hand. So far, it appears Laban is winning. With family like that, who needs enemies?

Sister Rivalry and The Birth Wars (Genesis 29:31-35; 30:1-24)

Laban's deception created a polygamous marriage. Polygamy is not God's norm. It was not God's original design. God's standard is one man and one woman. I said before that though we see polygamous marriages in the Old Testament among God's people, such marriages are never presented in any positive light. No one who engaged in polygamy remained unharmed in one way or another.

Understandably so, the sisters became enemies. There exists animosity and envy with each other. They become rivals and wrestle with each other, not literally, but they fight to outdo each other by seeing who can give Jacob more children. This is how Rachel frames the matter. In the beginning she sees that Leah is bearing Jacob multiple sons before she is able to even bear one, so she recruits a surrogate who bears a child for he and Rachel says, “With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed.” So she called his name Naphtali.” (Genesis 30:8, ESV)

When Leah sees what Rachel did, she says, “Oh, it’s on now! Two can play that game!” and she too recruits her servant to serve as a surrogate mother.

His first love Rachel, however, is the last to actually bear him children. If we count from the time that Laban first agreed to give Rachel in marriage to Jacob, it took twenty years for her to bear Jacob a son. The other women collectively bore Jacob [insert number] of children before Rachel bore him even one. She gives birth Joseph who ends up playing a major role in the survival of the family (but that story is reserved for later). Sadly, Rachel dies when she gives birth to the second son, Benjamin. What a hard life for Jacob. He wanted only one wife and he worked 14 years before he even married. She was the last to bear him children and she dies giving birth to the second.

These details give us a clue in chapters to come why Jacob appears to favor Joseph and Benjamin over the rest of the brothers. They were not just Rachel’s boys, but they the children of his old age. The Bible explicitly says this; Jacob “loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age” (Genesis 37:3). Unfortunately this obvious favoritism exacerbated and already volatile situation in this less-than-ideal family.

Jacob loved Benjamin so much that in later chapters, when the brothers travel to Egypt for food, the brothers are told by the Egyptian authority that they cannot take Benjamin back home with them. They object and plead with the authorities saying, “We cannot go home without Benjamin. If we go home without him our father will die for his “life is bound up in the boy’s life” (Genesis 44:30). At that point Rachel was dead, and Jacob thought Joseph was dead too. The only son connected to Rachel was Benjamin. But I’m getting ahead of myself.

Jacob’s Second Opportunity to Leave: Name Your Wages (Genesis 30:27)

The Bible tells us that “as soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, “Send me away, that I may go to my own home and country. Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, that I may go, for you know the service that I have given you” (Genesis 30:25–26).

Jacob had fulfilled his service twice over. He’d served 14 years and no longer owed Laban anything. Laban could not really complain since had been compensated several times over. He’d enjoyed 14-years of divine prosperity through Jacob, but despite the fulfillment of Jacob’s obligations, Laban, greedy as he was, delays Jacob’s departure once again.

But how will he do this? He doesn't have any more wives to offer, and I don't think Jacob even cared for another one at this point. He had not even cared for more than one to begin with. He had desired only Rachel, yet he ended up with four!

So what can Laban do? Laban finally admits and confesses to Jacob, "I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you. Name your wages, and I will give it" (Genesis 30:27–28).

The slavery had ended for Jacob. He was now in a position to negotiate terms as somewhat of an equal to Laban. He wanted to share in the profits of the flocks so as to accumulate wealth and thus provide for his own household (30:30). For Jacob, this business venture was about his wives whereas as for Laban it was about his wealth. For Jacob, this was about family, whereas for Laban it was about finances.

Jacob's Proposal: Speckled, Spotted and Striped Sheep and Goats

Laban's Former Status - So the first thing Jacob does to build his case is to remind Laban of where he was financially before Jacob arrived; "You had little before I came" (30:30)

Jacob's Track Record - Notice also how he appeals to his own work ethic and track record in caring for Laban's flocks by maximizing profit and minimizing loss.

Jacob's Work Ethic - Elsewhere he says to Laban, "These twenty years I have been with you. Your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks. What was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you. I bore the loss of it myself. From my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night." (Genesis 31:38–39, ESV)

Laban cannot deny of what Jacob has said. Neither does he have much leverage. Jacob is a free man. Jacob has the upper hand. What can Laban do? If he lets Jacob go, then there goes the cause of his prosperity. So Laban reasons it is better to allow Jacob a share in the profits rather than to not have any at all because of Jacob's departure.

So, like anyone negotiating a business contract you try not to make the first offer. You allow the other party to make their offer in order to get an idea of what they want. Then you make a counter offer. So Laban says to Jacob, "name your wages... what shall I give you" (30:28, 31). In other words, "What do you propose? Name the conditions of your contract."

To Laban's astonishment, Jacob's proposal doesn't seem to make sense. He appears to sell himself short. Laban must be thinking, "What an idiot!"

Jacob's proposal

“Let me pass through all your flock today, removing from it every speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats, and they shall be my wages.” (Genesis 30:32, ESV)

Jacob knows all along that he’s dealing with a cheat. He’s making a deal with the devil so to speak. He knows that Laban is the kind of man who will not keep his word. He knows that Laban is the kind of person who changes the terms of agreements whenever he sees that things may not work out in his favor. He makes up the rules as he goes along. This is how Jacob ended up with more than one wife to begin with!

Jacob’s Spiritual Heritage

Jacob’s real leverage. The LORD.

Jacob is the grandson of the great patriarch Abraham. Jacob is the grandson of the man whom the Bible calls a “friend of God” (James 2:23). Laban might be aware that there is divine favor upon Jacob’s life, but he doesn’t really know Yahweh. Up to this point he had not showed any fear in mistreating Jacob, but that was about to change.

“But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, “You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off”; fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Behold, all who are incensed against you shall be put to shame and confounded; those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish. You shall seek those who contend with you, but you shall not find them; those who war against you shall be as nothing at all. For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, “Fear not, I am the one who helps you.”” (Isaiah 41:8–13, ESV)

The LORD had appeared to Jacob too,

“Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” (Genesis 28:14–15, ESV)

This is the only reason Jacob comes out winning. During his dealings with Laban, the LORD appeared to Jacob and said, “for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you” (Genesis 31:12).

The LORD had seen the injustice. It was time to get Jacob out of there. The LORD had a purpose in Jacob’s life those twenty years, but it was time for Jacob to pack up and go home. Before Jacob leaves, however, he repeats in Jacob’s life what he had done

both in his father and grandfather's lives. The LORD takes some of the wealth of the oppressor and transfers it to his people.

Abraham left Egypt with the wealth of Egypt wealth.
Isaac left King Abimelech with Abimelech's wealth.

And so Jacob too, he would depart from him who oppressed him, but he wouldn't leave as he came in. He'd arrived with only his staff, but he would leave with "large flocks, female servants and male servants and camels and donkeys" (Genesis 30:43). How wealthy was Jacob when he left?

Application

Concerning Laban

"Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven." (Colossians 4:1)

"Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him." (Ephesians 6:9)

Though Laban was Jacob's father-in-law, their primary relationship looked more like a master-slave relationship. Laban did not deal justly or fairly with Jacob at all.

"A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous." (Proverbs 13:22, ESV)

Laban had not left an inheritance for his daughters, they said of their father, *"Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has indeed devoured our money"* (Genesis 31:14–15).

Thus both Jacob and Laban's daughters recognized what God had done for them. Jacob said, *"God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me."* (Genesis 31:9). And Laban's daughters said to Jacob, *"All the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, whatever God has said to you, do"* (Genesis 31:16).

Laban Overtakes Jacob (Genesis 31:22-55)

Laban has the gall to paint Jacob as the bad guy. Listen to how he frames the event of Jacob's rightful departure, he accuses Jacob as taking his "daughters" like "captives of the sword" (Genesis 31:26).

The insinuation is that Jacob came like a raider and plundered Laban and took kidnapped his daughters.

He then says that Jacob did not have to leave secretly as he did, that he was willing to throw him a going away party, “I might have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre? And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? Now you have done foolishly” (Genesis 31:27–28).

Jacob suffered injustice

Jesus: No one ever suffered a greater Injustice

Like Jacob, Jesus rendered good service. He went about doing good, healing people of all kinds of diseases even raising the dead. He fed the hungry doing all of it at his own cost.

He did not even defend himself. Like a lamb before its shearers are silent, he opened not his mouth. The closest he ever came to offering any kind of defense is when they asked to testify about the accusations and he said,

Jesus answered him, “I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said” (John 18:20–21, ESV)

“He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” (1 Peter 2:22–23, ESV)

Jesus entrusted “himself to him who judges justly.”

Jacob and Esau’s Reunion

I do not exactly, but here is an idea. During his return, he knew he would run into his brother Esau. He feared that even after 20 years Esau would still be holding a grudge. In order to appease him, he sets aside a gifts for Esau.

The Bible says that Jacob took “from what he had...a present for his brother Esau, two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milking camels and their calves, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys.” (Genesis 32:13–15)

Scripture References for Translation

“Many seek the favor of a generous man, and everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts.” (Proverbs 19:6, ESV)

"Muchos buscan el favor del generoso, y todo hombre es amigo del que da"