

The God of the Way: A Study in Genesis 31

This chapter is a remarkable turning point in the life of Jacob. For twenty years, Jacob has been living in Padan Aram, under the roof of his father-in-law, Laban. If you remember the history of these two men, it's been a chess match of wits. Laban was a negotiator, a man of the world, and Jacob—well, he was a "heel-catcher" from the start. But something has changed.

In the first few verses, we see a shift in the atmosphere. The sons of Laban are whispering. They're saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's." Jealousy is a green-eyed monster, and it had moved into Laban's house. Jacob looks at Laban's face and realizes the "good old days" of favor are over.

1. When God Says "Go"

Notice verse 3. The Lord speaks to Jacob: "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you."

There is a vital principle here for our lives. Jacob didn't just run because things got tough; he waited for the word of the Lord. Often, we want to jump ship the moment a situation becomes uncomfortable, but God uses those "tight spots" to prepare us for the next move. When God gives the command, He also gives the promise: "I will be with you."

Jacob calls Rachel and Leah out to the field. He doesn't want to be overheard in the tents. He explains the situation—how Laban changed his wages ten times. Ten times! But look at Jacob's testimony in verse 7: "But God did not allow him to hurt me."

Believer, you need to know tonight that your boss, your government, or your circumstances do not have the final say over your life. God is the one who holds your "wages." He is the one who prospers. Jacob realizes that it wasn't his own cleverness with the spotted and speckled sheep that made him rich; it was the intervention of the God of Bethel.

2. The Flight and the Pursuit

Jacob gathers his family, his livestock, and his goods and departs secretly while Laban is off shearing sheep. Now, Rachel does something foolish—she steals her father's household idols. It shows us that even in a family being led by God, there are still old habits and worldly attachments that people try to cling to.

Laban finds out three days later and pursues them for seven days. He catches up to them in the mountains of Gilead. Laban comes in hot, ready to do harm. But God—and I love those two words in the Bible—But God came to Laban in a dream and said, "Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad."

When Laban finally confronts Jacob, he puts on this religious, hypocritical front. He says, "Why did you flee? I would have sent you away with songs and harps!" We know that's a lie. Without God's intervention, Laban would have stripped Jacob bone-dry.

3. The Heap of Witness

After a heated exchange where Jacob finally lets out twenty years of pent-up frustration—telling Laban how he bore the loss of every torn sheep and worked through the frost and the drought—they decide to make a covenant.

They pile up stones as a boundary. Laban calls it Jegar Sahadutha in Aramaic, and Jacob calls it Galeed in Hebrew. Both mean "The Heap of Witness." Then we see that famous word: Mizpah.

In verse 49, Laban says, "May the Lord watch between you and me when we are absent one from another."

Now, we often see this on friendship cards or jewelry, but in the context, this wasn't a sweet "God bless you" sentiment. It was a threat! Laban was saying, "I don't trust you as far as I can throw you, and since I can't keep my eye on you anymore, I'm asking God to be the policeman. If you mistreat my daughters or cross this line to hurt me, may God get you!"

It was a boundary of separation. Sometimes, God has to put a "Mizpah" between us and our past. He has to close a door so firmly that we can never go back to the old life, the old idols, or the old bondages.

Practical Application

What do we take home from Genesis 31?

- Trust God's Timing: If you are in a "Laban" situation right now—where you feel cheated or unappreciated—keep your eyes on the Lord. Work as unto Him, not unto men. He sees the injustice, and He is your Great Rewarder.
- Leave the Idols Behind: Don't be like Rachel, trying to bring the "household gods" of your past into the promised land of your future. God wants your whole heart, not a heart divided.

A Challenge for the Believer

Are you moving because God told you to, or are you running out of fear? Jacob was afraid of Laban, but he moved because God said, "Return." Make sure your steps are ordered by the Word of God. Trust that if He has called you to a new season, He is more than able to protect you from the "Labans" that pursue you.

An Invitation to the Unbeliever

Perhaps you feel like Jacob tonight—constantly wrestling, constantly trying to get ahead, but feeling like life is just one long "wage change" and disappointment. You've been looking for security in things, in cleverness, or maybe even in "household idols" of your own making.

The truth is, we are all fallen. We have all tried to be the masters of our own fate. But God, in His incredible love, looked at our condition and didn't leave us there. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus didn't just give us a set of rules; He gave His very life. On that cross, He shed His precious blood to pay the debt for your sins and mine. He took the "wages" we deserved so that we could receive the inheritance of the Father. And three days later, He rose again! That resurrection is the shout from heaven that He is God, He is the Savior, and He is the Lord of all.

If you are tired of the wrestling, you can come to Him right now. You don't have to clean yourself up first. You just have to come.