

# genesis

## God's Book of Beginnings

### The Division Between Jacob and Laban (Genesis 31)

#### Jacob Flees from Laban

**31:1-3** The jealousy by Laban and sons for the blessings from God on Jacob created increasing dissention. Soon, the "Lord said to Jacob": go back to the PL, "I will be with you" <sup>Matthew 28:20</sup>.

**31:4-9** Jacob sent for his wives and told them his concerns, reminded them about his blessings from "the God of [his] father" and about his unethical treatment by "[their] father" <sup>Amos 8:2b-6</sup>.  
Laban tried to suppress Jacob's prosperity, but the blessings of God cannot be blocked by man <sup>v.5</sup>.

**31:10-13** Jacob recalled his dream at Bethel <sup>Genesis 28:12-15</sup> when the Lord confirmed his part in the Abrahamic Covenant, instructed him to leave his homeland and go to his "native land" <sup>v.3</sup>.  
The "angel of God" who spoke to Jacob <sup>v.11-13</sup> in Paddan Aram was the same God <sup>v.13</sup> (Lord Jesus) as the "angel of the Lord" who spoke to Abraham in "the region of Moriah" <sup>Genesis 22:11-12,15-18</sup>.

**31:14-16** Rachel and Leah were glad that God blessed their husband, when much of Laban's livestock was transferred to Jacob, because the sisters had not received their share in the "inheritance of [their] father's estate". They encouraged Jacob to "do whatever God" told him.

**31:17-21** Jacob prepared his family and livestock and left for "the land of Canaan" to see his "father Isaac". However, just prior to their departure, Rachel "stole" the "gods" of her father. Moses noted Jacob's leaving without telling Laban <sup>Genesis 30:25</sup> was considered a deception <sup>v.20</sup>.  
Rachel took her father's "household gods" <sup>Judges 18:14,17,20</sup> (*tērāpîm* : small pagan idols <sup>Ezekiel 21:21</sup>).

The "River" <sup>v.21</sup> was the Euphrates River, and the hills of Gilead were NNE of the Dead Sea.

#### Laban Pursues Jacob

**31:22-24** Three days later, Laban was "told" (unknown source) "Jacob [and family] had fled". Laban/family "pursued" and was able to catch up in seven days in the "hill country of Gilead". God spoke to Laban: "Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad" <sup>Genesis 24:50</sup>.  
Jacob had a three-day lead, but the Laban group was smaller and able to catch up in seven days.

## Genesis 31-33

God's message to Laban was an example of His protection of the patriarchs Genesis 12:17-20, 20:3-7, 26:8-11.

The "good" way Laban could talk would be by trying to talk Jacob into staying (again Genesis 30:25-34) and the "bad" way would be by attempting to shame Jacob into returning to Paddan Aram with him.

**31:25-30** Laban accused Jacob of "stealing" his daughters, his grandchildren and his "gods".

Jacob had shown respect in his earlier attempt to leave, but Laban talked him out of it Genesis 30:25-28.

Laban's desire to say "good-bye" to his daughters and grandchildren would be understandable under normal conditions, but with Jacob's 20 years of labor for Laban and all of the deception and agitation between Jacob and Laban's families, leaving quietly was an appropriate choice at the time. However, "stealing" Laban's personal property (his "gods") was wrong under any circumstances.

**31:31-35** Jacob defended leaving without notice by saying he was "afraid" of Laban's reaction.

Jacob told Laban to search the camp for his gods, and whoever took them would die Genesis 44:9.

Rachel hid the idols in her camel's saddle, sat on them, and told Laban she could not get up.

Laban's 'thorough' search of the entire camp of Jacob turned up nothing Genesis 44:11-13.

Much like Jacob, Rachel became a deceiver when she successfully hid her father's idols with a lie.

Laban's exhaustive search for his "household gods" proved he was committed to pagan worship.

**31:36-37** Being ignorant of Rachel's thievery, Jacob became angry after Laban's futile search.

He tried to embarrass Laban by telling him to put what he had found in front of their relatives.

**31:38-42** Believing he was in the right in every aspect of the situation (he spent 20 years of

hard labor 2 Corinthians 11:27 for his wives and livestock for Laban), in spite of Laban's abuse, Jacob told Laban he left with only what was his, because of God's blessing and protection.

**31:43** In spite of all Jacob's work for Laban and the agreements between the two of them, Laban claimed everything belonged to him ("my daughters", "my children" and "my flocks").

**31:44-55** Realizing he had no actual legal right to all he claimed <sup>v.43</sup>, Laban suggested they make a covenant Genesis 21:27. Jacob, Laban and everyone with them set up a pillar ("heap") of stones as a witness of their oath to each other and a permanent mark dividing their lands. Jacob offered a sacrifice, they ate a consecration meal, and Laban "left and returned home".

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## Genesis 31-33

Laban called the place of the oath *Jegar Sahadutha* (Aramaic) and Jacob called it *Galeed* (Hebrew). Both names mean “witness heap”. It was also called *Mizpah*, meaning “watchtower” Isaiah 21:8.

Many people interpret the covenant and the stone “pillar/heap” as referring to a positive connection between Jacob and Laban, but actually it was an oath out of distrust for each other (two deceivers). In addition, the boundary also indicated the Hebrew’s permanent break from the people of Haran.

### Jacob and Esau; Jacob and God (Genesis 32)

#### Jacob Prepares to Meet with Esau

**32:1-2** As Jacob left Laban (leaving one crisis behind him) and started toward Esau (the next anticipated crisis ahead of him), he was met by “the angels of God” Genesis 28:12.

Jacob named the place Mahanaim (“two camps”), because it was both his camp and God’s camp.

As he fled from Esau toward Laban, Jacob saw heavenly angels in a dream Genesis 28:12, and here he was fleeing from Laban toward Esau and is again met by a host of ministering angels Hebrews 1:14.

The two angelic places were Bethel (“house of God” Genesis 28:17) and Mahanaim (“camp of God” v.2).

**32:3-8** Jacob and Esau exchanged messages: Jacob explained where he was for 20 years and his hope for there to be peace between the brothers; however, he was told Esau was coming with “four hundred men”. Jacob reacted to the dispatch with “fear and distress”, because of the men and the last thing Esau said about him before Jacob left for Paddan Aram Genesis 27:41. He split his entourage and animals into two groups, hoping to save half from Esau’s attack v.8.

Edom and Seir are used here as near synonymous terms, meaning the land S & SE of the Dead Sea.

**32:9-12** Jacob offered a humble prayer (“I am not worthy of all...you have shown” me) to the ‘God of Abraham and Isaac’, requesting protection with a mixture of confidence/fear Mark 9:24.

Jacob’s prayer was his first recorded since his earlier encounter with God at Bethel Genesis 28:20-22.

As he waited for Esau to arrive, was Jacob’s prayer a good one? Why or why not? Luke 18:9-14

**32:13-21** Jacob selected a large number of animals as a gift, in hopes of pacifying his brother. Prior to his heading toward Esau, he sent his men and the gifts ahead of him as a buffer.

Jacob’s appeasement plan v.13-21 showed a lack of faith in God’s protection promises Genesis 28:15, 31:3.

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## Genesis 31-33

### Jacob Wrestles with God

**32:22-25** Jacob sent his wives, family and all his possessions south across the Jabbok River. Remaining on the north side of the river, Jacob and a “man” wrestled “until daybreak”. Sensing a stalemate, the “man” “touched” Jacob and dislocated his hip <sup>Genesis 47:31</sup>.

The Jabbok (Zarqa) River flows west into the Jordan midway between the Galilee and Dead Seas.

Jacob was ninety-seven years old when he wrestled with the “man” all night at the Jabbok River. (Joseph was born 6 years before they left Haran and arrived in Mahanaim <sup>Genesis 30:24-25 + 31:41 + 32:1-2</sup>; Joseph was 30 when he began serving Pharaoh, then there were 7 abundant years <sup>Genesis 41:46-47</sup>; at the end of 2 years of famine, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers <sup>Genesis 45:4,6</sup> and Jacob came to Egypt at the age of 130 <sup>Genesis 47:8-9</sup>; therefore, it was 33 years from the time Jacob, Joseph, family arrived in Mahanaim until Jacob arrived in Egypt <sup>30-6+7+2</sup>. QED: Jacob was ~97 <sup>130-33</sup> at Mahanaim.)

Our view of Jacob went from Mama’s boy <sup>Genesis 27</sup> ⇒ herdsman <sup>Genesis 29-30</sup> ⇒ wrestler with God.

**32:26-29** The “man said let me go”, but Jacob would not let go until he was given a blessing. The two exchanged questions about their names. The “man” never answered, but Jacob gave his name. Jacob received a blessing, as well as a new name: Israel (“he struggles with God”).

Why did Jacob demand a blessing from the “man”, when he had already been blessed by Isaac?

Knowing Abraham <sup>Genesis 12:2</sup> and Isaac <sup>Genesis 25:11</sup>

had a direct blessings from God, and that his

blessing from God through Isaac <sup>Genesis 27:30, 28:1</sup>

resulted from deception, so perhaps Jacob saw this as his best opportunity to legitimize his blessing.



Jacob’s life was constantly characterized by struggles: with Esau <sup>Genesis 25-27</sup>, his father <sup>Genesis 27</sup>, his father-in-law <sup>Genesis 29-31</sup>, his wives <sup>Genesis 30</sup> and with God <sup>v.28</sup>. ...how about the nation of Israel? ...how about each and every Christian? ...how about every human being

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**32:30-32** When the “man” renamed Jacob ⇒ Israel, Jacob then realized the “man” was God, because why else would Jacob have named the place, Peniel, meaning the “face of God”?

In addition to the evidence of his new name, Israel, Jacob’s conclusion was confirmed much later through the prophet Hosea <sup>Hosea 12:2-5</sup> that he had wrestled with God (i.e., Jesus, in a Christophany).

Two Biblical references seem to indicate Jacob limped the rest of his life <sup>Genesis 47:31, Hebrews 11:21</sup>.

Orthodox Jews do not eat the hindquarter tendon; however, it is not in the Law, but is in the Talmud.

### Jacob Meets Esau (Genesis 33)

**33:1-7** Jacob saw Esau and his 400 men coming toward him. Changing his strategy from “[dividing] his people ... into two groups” <sup>Genesis 32:7</sup>, Jacob decided on three divisions: maidservants/children, Leah/children and Rachel/Joseph in the reverse order of importance. Jacob then approached Esau in humility, bowing down 7 times <sup>Genesis 42:6</sup>; however, amazingly Esau ran to greet and embrace Jacob with great joy <sup>Luke 15:20</sup>. Jacob then presented to Esau the three groups of his family, who all, each in turn, “bowed down” in humility before Esau.

**33:8-16** Esau declared that Jacob’s gift was unnecessary, but Jacob convinced him to keep it. Esau then wanted them to depart together, but using his young children and the nursing animals with as an excuse to move more slowly, Jacob insisted that Esau go ahead of them. Jacob acknowledged God’s gracious hand upon his life as he introduced his family and the gift. He also recognized how much Esau had changed in 20 years, because now he forgave like God <sup>v.10</sup>. Culturally, Esau’s acceptance of the gift indicated he agreed to a covenant of friendship with Jacob and was proof of his forgiveness, because he could not hold a grudge while under the covenant.

**33:17-20** Having no intention of going south to Seir (Edom) with Esau, Jacob headed west to Succoth, where he made shelters for his family and livestock. After an unspecified length of time, Jacob then continued on to Shechem, where he purchased land for his tent and an altar. Succoth (“shelters”) was just a short distance west of Peniel, and still east of the Jordan River. Shechem was located 20 miles west of Succoth and between Mt.Gerizim and Mt.Ebal <sup>Deuteronomy 11:29</sup>. Jacob named the land El Elohe Israel, meaning “God, the God of Israel” or “Mighty God of Israel”. This was the second plot of ground legally belonging to the line of Abraham <sup>Genesis 23:17-18</sup>, but of course it was/is all God’s <sup>Leviticus 25:23</sup>, to be given to the descendants of Abraham <sup>Deuteronomy 34:1-4</sup>.

**Stay tuned: The next section of Scripture <sup>Genesis 34</sup> makes it clear that Jacob's decision to stay at Shechem, instead of quickly returning to Bethel <sup>Genesis 28:10-21</sup>, was a mistake.**

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