



## Brown Community Group Discussion Guide

Genesis 30:25-31:35 – Contract with Laban; Parting with Laban

May 12, 2019

In our last lesson of Genesis, we covered Jacob meeting Rachel, Laban deceiving Jacob concerning Leah and Jacob's eventual marriage to Rachael. Chapter 30 then started off discussing the Leah and Rachel rivalry, multiple children being born to Leah and the handmaids and eventually God allowing Rachael to have children through the birth of Joseph.

In today's lesson, it will pick up right after the birth of Joseph to Rachel. Jacob has now been serving Laban more than 14 years and will eventually leave at the end of the lesson a full 20 years from his arrival.

We will see the hand of God's governance and plan through this lesson. While God's people have actions, decisions and general life issues, God hand of guidance and grace always guides his people. God has his plan and it will not be changed.

### 1) Jacob's Contract with Laban 30:25-43

***<sup>25</sup> After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me on my way so I can go back to my own homeland. <sup>26</sup> Give me my wives and children, for whom I have served you, and I will be on my way. You know how much work I've done for you." <sup>27</sup> But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you." <sup>28</sup> He added, "Name your wages, and I will pay them." <sup>29</sup> Jacob said to him, "You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care. <sup>30</sup> The little you had before I came has increased greatly, and the Lord has blessed you wherever I have been. But now, when may I do something for my own household?" <sup>31</sup> "What shall I give you?" he asked. "Don't give me anything," Jacob replied. "But if you will do this one thing for me, I will go on tending your flocks and watching over them: <sup>32</sup> Let me go through all your flocks today and remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-colored lamb and every spotted or speckled goat. They will be my wages. <sup>33</sup> And my honesty will testify for me in the future, whenever you check on the wages you have paid me. Any goat in my possession that is not speckled or spotted, or any lamb that is not dark-colored, will be considered stolen." <sup>34</sup> "Agreed," said Laban. "Let it be as you have said." <sup>35</sup> That same day he removed all the male goats that were streaked or spotted, and all the speckled or spotted female goats (all that had white on them) and all the dark-colored lambs, and he placed them in the care of his sons. <sup>36</sup> Then he put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob continued to tend the rest of Laban's flocks.***

Laban had been wondering why his business had been doing so good under the leadership and direction of Jacob. Was this just smart business decisions or somehow was "Jacob's God" involved in this superb success story. Laban had seen nothing like this during his own time before Jacob arrived. It is interesting to note that Laban had no idea how to communicate with God. Divination was the art of attempting to see the future through supernatural powers. This was definitely not praying to God for guidance or understanding, this was more witchcraft to understand the current situation and future.

In verse 27, his comment was not one of favor or gratitude, it was one of greed and self-gratification. He did not want the "golden goose" to be leaving his possession and presence. He knew that it would not be good for him and his concern was for no one else but himself. Laban was taking a dangerous chance by directly asking Jacob for his exit price, but knew that he would be reasonable. To Laban's surprise Jacob did not want anything at the present, but only wanted the off-color animals born in the future. But as we will soon find, Jacob had a plan and was not being totally upfront in his business proposal! Again, Genesis is filled with examples of God's people making decisions that are not honest, truthful and straight forward. They are stories of real people with problems, no one was perfect even though they are giants of the bible

to us. We need to be careful in discerning God's plan and expectations versus Man's sinful decisions. This is a hard topic and situationally deciding, but we must consider this topic as we read through Genesis.

## 2) **Jacob's Wiley Scheme 30:37-43**

***<sup>37</sup> Jacob, however, took fresh-cut branches from poplar, almond and plane trees and made white stripes on them by peeling the bark and exposing the white inner wood of the branches. <sup>38</sup> Then he placed the peeled branches in all the watering troughs, so that they would be directly in front of the flocks when they came to drink. When the flocks were in heat and came to drink, <sup>39</sup> they mated in front of the branches. And they bore young that were streaked or speckled or spotted. <sup>40</sup> Jacob set apart the young of the flock by themselves, but made the rest face the streaked and dark-colored animals that belonged to Laban. Thus he made separate flocks for himself and did not put them with Laban's animals. <sup>41</sup> Whenever the stronger females were in heat, Jacob would place the branches in the troughs in front of the animals so they would mate near the branches, <sup>42</sup> but if the animals were weak, he would not place them there. So the weak animals went to Laban and the strong ones to Jacob. <sup>43</sup> In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.***

Jacob's basic plan was based on the ancient belief that the traumatic experience of animals when they conceived would affect the nature of their young. For the strongest, he would arrange the tree branches to be partially stripped of their bark with the expectation that the streaked and spotted kids would result. For the black sheep, he had a different procedure, whereby they had them look forward to the black livestock.

While this made perfect sense to the descendants of old, modern breeders take a dim view of any prospect for success. Jacob himself recognized the problem with his plan and freely admitted his ruse would have little chance of success if God himself had not caused the correct situation and breeding of the right flock.

## 3) **Jacob's Marching Orders 31:1-16**

***<sup>1</sup> Jacob heard that Laban's sons were saying, "Jacob has taken everything our father owned and has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father." <sup>2</sup> And Jacob noticed that Laban's attitude toward him was not what it had been. <sup>3</sup> Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you." <sup>4</sup> So Jacob sent word to Rachel and Leah to come out to the fields where his flocks were. <sup>5</sup> He said to them, "I see that your father's attitude toward me is not what it was before, but the God of my father has been with me. <sup>6</sup> You know that I've worked for your father with all my strength, <sup>7</sup> yet your father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times. However, God has not allowed him to harm me. <sup>8</sup> If he said, 'The speckled ones will be your wages,' then all the flocks gave birth to speckled young; and if he said, 'The streaked ones will be your wages,' then all the flocks bore streaked young. <sup>9</sup> So God has taken away your father's livestock and has given them to me. <sup>10</sup> "In breeding season I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted. <sup>11</sup> The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob.' I answered, 'Here I am.' <sup>12</sup> And he said, 'Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, 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 and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.'" <sup>14</sup> Then Rachel and Leah replied, "Do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father's estate? <sup>15</sup> Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us, but he has used up what was paid for us. <sup>16</sup> Surely all the wealth that God took away from our father belongs to us and our children. So do whatever God has told you."***

Seeing that he had fallen out of favor with Laban, Jacob was ready to listen to God's directive to return home. God's command was the exact opposite one given to Abraham all those years earlier. Abraham was told to leave his land and his kindred; Jacob was to return. Each generation must perceive God's will for its

own unique situation. What was right for someone else, may not be God's plan for you! We must be perceptive and discerning to understand the correct directions for our lives.

Jacob's expression about changing wages 10 times is figurative for a very large number of undefined times. Respecting the aspects of the agreement that was also favorable to Laban, he always kept the white sheep and the dark colored sheep. Even though Jacob was limited to the stripped or spotted animals, God continued to bless this by multiplying the flocks in Jacob's favor.

Let's be very clear here, it was not Jacob's cleverness that was responsible for the prolific breeding of his types of animals. It was God himself that saw to it that the right animals mated.

The response of Leah and Rachel showed their bitterness towards their father and loyalty to Jacob. They were enthusiastically with Jacob and would not be left behind with their father. It is interesting to note that both of them recognized that it was God himself that had created and allowed the "wealth" to come to Jacob away from Laban. God had provided and blessed them, it was not self created or earned by their own actions. Very interesting recognition indeed and no doubt they had previously talked with Jacob about this!

#### 4) Laban's Inquiry 31:17-35

*<sup>17</sup> Then Jacob put his children and his wives on camels, <sup>18</sup> and he drove all his livestock ahead of him, along with all the goods he had accumulated in Paddan Aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan. <sup>19</sup> When Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father's household gods. <sup>20</sup> Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him he was running away. <sup>21</sup> So he fled with all he had, crossed the Euphrates River, and headed for the hill country of Gilead. <sup>22</sup> On the third day Laban was told that Jacob had fled. <sup>23</sup> Taking his relatives with him, he pursued Jacob for seven days and caught up with him in the hill country of Gilead. <sup>24</sup> Then God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream at night and said to him, "Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad." <sup>25</sup> Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country of Gilead when Laban overtook him, and Laban and his relatives camped there too. <sup>26</sup> Then Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You've deceived me, and you've carried off my daughters like captives in war. <sup>27</sup> Why did you run off secretly and deceive me? Why didn't you tell me, so I could send you away with joy and singing to the music of timbrels and harps? <sup>28</sup> You didn't even let me kiss my grandchildren and my daughters goodbye. You have done a foolish thing. <sup>29</sup> I have the power to harm you; but last night the God of your father said to me, 'Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.' <sup>30</sup> Now you have gone off because you longed to return to your father's household. But why did you steal my gods?" <sup>31</sup> Jacob answered Laban, "I was afraid, because I thought you would take your daughters away from me by force. <sup>32</sup> But if you find anyone who has your gods, that person shall not live. In the presence of our relatives, see for yourself whether there is anything of yours here with me; and if so, take it." Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods. <sup>33</sup> So Laban went into Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two female servants, but he found nothing. After he came out of Leah's tent, he entered Rachel's tent. <sup>34</sup> Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them inside her camel's saddle and was sitting on them. Laban searched through everything in the tent but found nothing. <sup>35</sup> Rachel said to her father, "Don't be angry, my lord, that I cannot stand up in your presence; I'm having my period." So he searched but could not find the household gods.*

The translation "stole" is considered rather strong for Rachel's taking of the idols. The possession of household gods, was legal proof of the right of inheritance in that day. Rachel could have believed that the property was hers, she "appropriated" what she believed to be her property by right. This however did not make the act any less wrong since she did not tell her father beforehand and she then secretly withheld information about its location later. The teraphims many times were figurines in human shape.

While Jacob knew that Laban was correctly expressing the expected and desired treatment of a family member leaving, he also knew full well that this would not have happened to him had Laban known ahead of time. Laban was playing the “hurt father card” on them leaving without him being able to provide a proper send off, when in reality he wanted to use it totally to his advantage.

Jacob is depicted here in these verses as a man of “honor and integrity” and one who could not imagine anyone in his party having stolen the idols. But it is interesting to note, that it was only a few verses ago, he had concocted his own plan to deceive Laban, so he certainly was not without guilt. Little did he know, that his purity and comments in this situation would be putting his own wife’s life in jeopardy.

**5) Group Discussion:**

1. In the end of Chapter 30, why do you think Laban sought out “divination” to understand what was happening to him and why? Did he really have any concern for anybody but himself?
2. Was Jacob’s agreement with Laban and “plan” deceitful or wrong in that he was intentionally trying to trick him in Jacob’s favor?
  - a) Was this God’s plan? Or was this man’s decision that God used in this ultimate plan?
3. Did Jacob’s plan of breeding the flock in verses 37-42 have any success in and of itself? Or was this such a strange plan that if it worked, everyone would know that this had to be the hand of God?
4. What was Leah and Rachel’s attitude and comments to Jacob when they learned he wanted to leave and return to his homeland?
  - a) Were you surprised or not? Explain
5. Was Jacob, Leah and Rachel wrong in leaving the way they did from Laban?
6. Key points to contemplate from this lesson:
  - a) God’s hand of governance is always present in the lives of his people, whether we can discern it or not.
  - b) God has his plan and it will not be changed.
  - c) We always need to be very discerning about our decisions and whether they are within God’s plan for our lives; God always cleans up the mess of our decisions, but it is so much nicer to be in harmony with them from the start
  - d) We need to recognize that all of our hard work and plans will only be blessed if God desires and then they will succeed in spite of us many times.
  - e) We need to continually remember that all we have is from God and nothing of ourselves. God provides and blesses all and we are nothing more than Stewards of His Blessings!