

## BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

### “Choose This Day ...”

Genesis 31:1-55

2003

#### Introduction

In Genesis 31, we find Jacob at a crossroads in his life. He must make a choice. Either he can stay where he is – in virtual slavery to Laban, but comfortable and well-fed. Or he can respond to the call of God, which involved no small degree of risk and required a great deal of faith in God and His covenant promises.

It is the same crossroads that the people of Israel would face when they were given the opportunity to either remain in the predictable life of slavery in Egypt, or believe God’s promise of a land of their own which included uncertainty and a path through the desert.

It is the same crossroads that an unbeliever who is presented with the gospel faces. Stay where you are spiritually – in the familiar life of slavery to sin, guilt, fear and frustration, or you can have a new beginning in Christ. But this new life demands that you surrender your life to the lordship of Jesus Christ. You can’t have it both ways!

It is the same crossroads I find myself facing daily. “Choose this day whom you will serve!”

#### I Jacob Is Faced With A Choice

A. He could **stay** where he was [Verse 1-2]

1. He was accused by his brothers-in-law

a. “Jacob has taken everything our father owned and has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father”

Essentially, they were accusing Jacob of stealing their inheritance! And from their perspective, it was disappearing right before their very eyes.

As a result, they became envious and bitter toward Jacob.

**Application:** The blessings of God in a believer can illicit one of two responses in those around them:

1. A hunger for God (or)

2. An ungodly envy

“I wish I had your life!” “I wish I had your marriage!”

Prov 14:30 “A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.”

2. He was treated differently by Laban

Six years earlier, Laban was willing to pay any price to have Jacob stay and care for his flocks. But now Laban’s attitude was rapidly changing!

#### Application:

James 4:1-3 “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You

kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

B. He could **return** to his homeland [Verse 3]

1. He was directed and **assured** by God

The last recorded revelation that Jacob had received from God was twenty years earlier while he was still in the land of promise (28:10ff.). But now Jacob receives a divine directive to return to the land of promise.

a. “Go back to the land of your fathers”

b. “I will be with you”

Gen 28:15 “I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

## II Jacob Laid Out The Facts To Rachel and Leah

A. He described the **tension** with Laban [Verse 4-7a]

1. Laban’s attitude toward Jacob had changed

2. Laban had repeatedly **cheated** him

1 Peter 2:18-23 “Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”

B. He described God’s **protection** [Verse 5b, 7b-9]

1. God protected Jacob from harm

Even though Laban was trying to cheat Jacob, God was protecting him.

Ps 118:6 “The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”

2. God **gave** Jacob Laban’s livestock

Jacob was the kind of guy who follows you into a revolving door and comes out ahead of you. But it wasn’t his own scheming that brought him prosperity and protection. It was the blessing of God!

Prov 13:22 “A good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children, but a sinner's wealth is stored up for the righteous.”

C. He described God's revelation in a **dream** [Verse 10-13]

1. God had seen the injustice

"I have seen what Laban has done to you"

Deut 24:14-15 "Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns. Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise he may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin."

2. God called Jacob to return to Canaan

**Application:**

God told Jacob to go back to Bethel, back to the place where he first encountered the Lord in a personal way. Sometimes the way forward is to go back!

Rev 2:4-5 "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.

Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first."

### III Jacob Is Supported By Rachel and Leah

A. They agreed with Jacob's assessment [Verse 14-16a]

This may be the first time in quite a while when the sisters Leah and Rachel agreed on anything. They can agree in uniting against a common adversary: their father Laban!

Why? Because Laban had ...

1. Stolen their inheritance
2. Treated them like foreigners
3. Sold them and used up the money (from their dowry)

B. They **submitted** themselves to Jacob's leadership [Verse 16b]

1. "Do whatever God has told you"

By submitting themselves to Jacob's leadership, they were ultimately coming under the safety net of God's leadership and authority.

**Application:**

Men, we need to hear from God ("Do whatever **God** has told you!")

And women need to submit to their husbands, as to the Lord (Eph 5:22)

C. They departed with Jacob for Canaan [Verse 17-18]

It was nearly 300 miles from Haran to the mountains of Gilead.

And the journey must have been exhausting for Jacob knowing that:

1. Laban might be pursuing to kill him from behind
2. Esau, his brother, might be waiting to kill him ahead

**Application:** Keys to God's guidance in Jacob's life

1. God gave Jacob the desire to go back home – 6 years earlier (Gen 30:25)
2. Jacob's circumstances became unbearable

3. God gave Jacob divine and personal direction
4. Jacob received confirmation from the counsel of others in his life

D. They **deceived** Laban in their departure [Verse 19-21]

1. Rachel **stole** Laban's household idols

*Idols* = Teraphim = "Small figurines used in divination and to bring good luck"  
 Deut 27:15 "Cursed is the man who carves an image or casts an idol -- a thing detestable to the LORD, the work of the craftsman's hands."

Why did Rachel take them? Possibly ...

- a. To guarantee fertility
- b. For divination and protection during the journey to Canaan  
 Possibly to prevent Laban from using them to catch them (Gen 30:27)?
- c. But the reason best supported by the text and by archaeology is that Rachel stole the household gods in order to establish a future claim on Laban's family inheritance. The household gods were a token of the right to claim a portion of Laban's inheritance and the headship of the family.

**Application:**

In spite of the fact that Rachel had a growing trust in God, she was reluctant to make a complete break from her idolatrous past.

We aren't really any different. We may not be putting our trust in idols, but we still struggle at times with putting our full confidence in God and His Word.

Prov 3:5-6 "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

2. Jacob left without informing Laban

Jacob was doing God's will by returning to the land of promise, but he was not doing it in God's way. He was acting in the flesh rather than being led by the Spirit!

**Illustration:** Moses when he killed the Egyptian

We can get so caught up in doing God's will that we forget to ask how we are to do God's will. Our methods must always be consistent with the Word of God if our actions are to be honoring to God and rewarded by God.

Heb 11:6 "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

Prov 29:25 "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe."

#### IV Laban Accuses Jacob Of Deception

A. He pursued Jacob [Verse 22-23]

Catching up with Jacob was not so easy. Jacob had a three day head start. It took Laban and his men seven days to catch up to Jacob.

But before he did, the Lord appeared to Laban in a dream and warned him “not speak to Jacob either good or bad” (verse 24).

Job 5:12 “[God] thwarts the plans of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success.”

B. He **confessed** to Jacob [Verse 23, 29]

1. He intended to harm Jacob

a. “I have the power to harm you”

Laban intended to kill Jacob and forcibly take the people and the flocks.

John 19:10-11 “Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”

2. He was warned by God in a dream

a. “Do not say anything good or bad”

Gen 24:50 “Laban and Bethuel answered, “This is from the LORD; we can say nothing to you one way or the other.”

C. He **confronted** Jacob [Verse 25-30]

Laban plays the part of the offended father and grandfather whose deep affection for his daughters and grandchildren caused him great emotional pain when he found they had secretly left without any good-bye’s. Then he really overplays his hand when he says that if he’d only known, he would have thrown a big going away party. Right!!

Prov 26:23-26 “Like a coating of glaze over earthenware are fervent lips with an evil heart. A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbors deceit. Though his speech is charming, do not believe him, for seven abominations fill his heart. His malice may be concealed by deception, but his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.”

1. “Why have you deceived me?”

If this isn’t the pot calling the kettle black!

2. “Why did you steal my gods?”

Rachel was sitting on Laban’s gods! What a comical indictment against idolatry!

Jer 10:5 “Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good.”

Jacob, not knowing that Rachel had stolen the gods, challenged Laban to search his belongings. After the search comes up empty, Jacob unleashes 20 years of pent up frustration. **Angry** = Charah = “To blaze up in anger”

## V Jacob Defends His Integrity

### A. He defended his integrity [Verse 31-37]

“What is my crime?” “What sin have I committed?”

#### **Application:**

One of the things that I highly value is my integrity – primarily because I want to honor God. But in the last year, Becky and I, in an effort to biblically address a very serious offense against our family by another Christian in the community, have been repeatedly slandered. Until this happened, I never realized how important having a clear conscience and a good reputation was.

1 Peter 2:12 “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”

### B. He defended his character [Verse 38-41]

#### 1. He served Laban for 20 years

Col 3:22-24 “Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

#### 2. He was a source of blessing to Laban’s flocks

##### **Illustration:** Joseph in Potiphar’s house

Gen 39:5 “From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph.”

**Application:** May God make us faithful employees like Jacob and Joseph!

#### 3. He bore the cost of lost or stolen animals

It was customary for a shepherd to bring the carcass of a sheep to the owner as proof that the animal was actually killed by wild animals. Having provided proof, the shepherd would be freed from personal responsibility for the loss. But Jacob says he didn’t even do this. Instead, he went the extra mile -- he replaced any lost or stolen animals from his own flock.

Jacob was the model worker. He took care of the sheep, he absorbed losses, withstood terrible weather. Notice something here . . . Laban does not disagree with Jacob. He can’t argue with the integrity and example of Jacob’s life.

#### **Application:**

Titus 2:9-10 “Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show

that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.”

4. He more than paid for his wives and flocks

- a. 14 years for Leah and Rachel
- b. 6 years for the flocks

Jacob was a man of integrity and character. Even in difficult, unfair, and trying times he faithfully kept his word. He did his best in whatever he had to do. And God was pleased.

**Jacob’s principles for prosperity:**

1. Don’t make becoming wealthy your goal (Genesis 30:25-26).
2. Work hard and dedicate yourself to your employer’s success (Gen 30:26, 31:38-42).
3. And then trust God to prosper you (Genesis 30:31-33).

B. He testified to the sovereignty of God [Verse 42]

1. God **protected** Jacob from Laban
  - a. “If God had not been with me, you would have sent me away empty-handed”

**Application:**

By the way, this is Satan’s objective as well. He would love nothing more than to send you away empty handed – and preferably to hell. But if not hell, to heaven with no return on God’s investment.

John 10:10 “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

2. God saw Jacob’s hardship and hard work

2 Chron 16:9 “For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.”

3. God **rebuked** Laban in a dream

**VI Jacob and Laban Make A Covenant**

A. They set up a heap of **stones** and ate a meal [Verse 43-47]

*Galeed or Mizpah* = “The witness or watchtower”

In effect, the pillar of Mizpah meant, "If you do wrong, may God see it and punish!"

B. They delineated the terms of the covenant [Verse 48-53]

1. Jacob was not to mistreat Laban’s daughters

We have no evidence that Jacob had ever mistreated his wives.

2. Jacob was not to take other wives

The irony is that Jacob had only wanted Rachel. It was Laban who had deceived Jacob into taking a second wife in the first place.

### 3. Jacob and Laban were not to cross the boundary line

Laban was clearly implying that Jacob was a man who could not be trusted. In essence, Laban was assigning his own evil motives to Jacob and stating, “If you come on my side, the covenant is void and I will kill you.”

### C. Jacob made **sacrifice** to God and Laban returned home [Verse 54-55]

The long and stormy relationship between Laban and Jacob had finally come to an end!

This is the last mention of Laban we have in the Bible. Laban is an unfortunate example of a worldly, covetous man, one who knows about the true God. He had seen the reality of God in the life of Jacob, along with the power of God in His blessing and protection of Jacob. He himself had even enjoyed many of the blessings of God through his relationship to Jacob. In spite of all this, he chose to continue in his idolatry and self-centered, self-absorbed lifestyle. Rather than seeking to follow the truth of God’s plan as witnessed by Jacob, he merely resented and coveted the blessing of God on Jacob. In his vigorous pursuit of worldly success, he lost his family, his wealth and his hope of eternal life in Christ. He chose poorly!

## Conclusion

Today, we are at a crossroads. “Choose this day whom you will serve!”

Josh 24:14-15 “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

You can either serve the “gods” of this world, or you can serve the God of the universe.

You can either serve the men of this world, or you can serve Jesus Christ.

You can either serve yourself, or you can serve the King of kings and Lord of lords.

As it was with Jacob – as it was with the Israelites in Egypt – as it was with us before we came to Christ – God is calling us out of slavery and into the glorious kingdom of His Son, Jesus Christ. My prayer is that you and I will choose wisely!

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