

## Jacob Became Angry with Laban

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain to others that God knows the thoughts of their hearts. To do that, we can help our children learn to explain verses like Genesis 6:5 and 1 Samuel 16:7. In this topic, we want to help our children learn to understand why Jacob became angry with Laban.

Laban had said that he followed Jacob because Jacob had not given him the opportunity to have a proper farewell. However, in this topic, we are going to see the real reason why Laban pursued Jacob and his family. Genesis 31:30-32 says, “‘And now you have surely gone because you greatly long for your father’s house, *but* why did you steal my gods?’ Then Jacob answered and said to Laban, ‘Because I was afraid, for I said, “Perhaps you would take your daughters from me by force.” With whomever you find your gods, do not let him live. In the presence of our brethren, identify what I have of yours and take *it* with you.’ For Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them.” These verses show that Laban had a very different reason for following Jacob. He said that he could understand why Jacob had a longing to return to his father. However, his question shows the real reason why Laban had followed Jacob. Laban asked, “‘...why did you steal my gods?’” Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods of her father.

Jacob then explained his own fears. Jacob said that he had fled from Laban because he was afraid of Laban. He said that he was afraid Laban would try to take his daughters away from Jacob by force. Here, we see that Jacob felt that he could not trust Laban. Laban had changed his wages and cheated him so many times that Jacob had no trust of Laban. As a result, he said he had acted out of his fear of Laban because he imagined that Laban might actually take away his daughters by force. This tells us how Jacob had come to view Laban during the years he had worked for him. He did not feel that he could trust in any way. He realized that Laban might use force to get what he wanted. The fact that God had to warn Laban in a dream, in Genesis 31:23-24, “‘Then he took his brethren with him and pursued him for seven days’ journey, and he overtook him in the mountains of Gilead. But God had come to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said to him, ‘Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad’” probably meant that Jacob had made a wise decision to leave while Laban was away shearing his sheep. He could not be trusted.

Jacob was so sure that he had treated Laban honestly that he answered the accusation of Laban by saying, “‘With whomever you find your gods, do not let him live. In the presence of our brethren, identify what I have of yours and take *it* with you.’” Jacob did not even think about the possibility that Rachel had stolen the idols of Laban. The idols she had stolen were small female gods that Laban and his family worshiped. Various reasons are given as to why people think Rachel took those idols. At this time, she may have still been depending on the idols and was trying to worship both the gods of her father and the Creator who her husband worshiped. It is also possible that she thought the idols might help her to have additional children. Laban was so angry that his idols had been stolen that he had brought a whole group of men with him to get those idols back. This helps us to realize that Laban was a very strong idol worshiper who was

ready to do whatever it took to regain his idols. This was the reason he had brought this group of men with him and had traveled seven days to catch up with Jacob.

Genesis 31:33-35 says, “And Laban went into Jacob’s tent, into Leah’s tent, and into the two maids’ tents, but he did not find *them*. Then he went out of Leah’s tent and entered Rachel’s tent. Now Rachel had taken the household idols, put them in the camel’s saddle, and sat on them. And Laban searched all about the tent but did not find *them*. And she said to her father, ‘Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise before you, for the manner of women *is* with me.’ And he searched but did not find the household idols.” Laban quickly began the search for his idols. First, he searched the tent of Jacob. Then, he searched the tents of Leah and the tents of the two maids who had children by Jacob. Finally, he went to the tent of Rachel.

Meanwhile, Rachel had a little time to get ready for the coming of her father to her tent since he searched the other four tents first. We see that she had taken the idols of Laban and had put them in the saddle of the camel that she rode when they traveled. Then, she sat on the saddle. As a result, Rachel was sitting on the saddle when her father came into her tent. We see that Laban searched all about the tent. That meant that he went through everything in the tent that was large enough to hold those small idols. Rachel said to him, as he searched, “‘Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise before you, for the manner of women *is* with me.’” Laban accepted the reason why Rachel did not stand up. He did not even think about the fact that the idols could be on the inside or underside of the camel saddle. He just searched through everything else in the tent and did not find his household idols.

Jacob watched while Laban went through all of the tents and found nothing. Genesis 31:36-42 says, “Then Jacob was angry and rebuked Laban, and Jacob answered and said to Laban: ‘What *is* my trespass? What *is* my sin, that you have so hotly pursued me? Although you have searched all my things, what part of your household things have you found? Set *it* here before my brethren and your brethren, that they may judge between us both! These twenty years I *have been* with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock. That which was torn *by beasts* I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, *whether* stolen by day or stolen by night. *There* I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes. Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked *you* last night.’” For twenty years, Laban had cheated and changed his wages ten times. Here, we see that Jacob became angry and rebuked Laban for his sins.

Jacob asked three questions as he rebuked Laban. His first question was, “‘What is my trespass?’” The word translated “trespass” is usually translated transgression in the Old Testament and is another word for *rebellion or sin and speaks of sin against God*. His second question was, “‘What is my sin, that you have so hotly pursued me?’” The word translated “sin” speaks of *sin or sin offering* in the Old Testament. Most commonly, this word speaks of sins against another person. As a result, Jacob was asking in what way he had sinned against Laban during those twenty years. He also asked if he had sinned in a way that would cause Laban to

chase him with such an angry attitude. Third, Jacob asked, “Although you have searched all my things, what part of your household things have you found?” In this question, we see that Jacob asked Laban to show anything he had found in the search through all of the tents. Jacob said that if Laban had found anything Jacob had taken, he could place those things before their brethren and those brothers could judge between Jacob and Laban. However, Laban had found nothing, so there was nothing he could place before his brethren.

Jacob then went on to tell about the way he had taken care of the flocks of Laban. He had cared for the flock of Laban for twenty years. God had blessed those flocks so that the female sheep and goats did not have miscarriages during that time. In addition, Jacob said that he had not eaten any of the male sheep and goats. Jacob also said that when any of the sheep or goats of Laban had been killed by wild animals, Jacob had replaced those animals with animals of his own so that Laban did not lose any animals that were killed. He reminded Laban that if any animals were stolen, Laban required the replacement of those animals whether they were stolen during the day or whether it happened during the night. Jacob also said that he worked for Laban day and night. He had to deal with the drought during the day and the frost during the night. Many times, the sheep and goats would give birth to their young during the night so Jacob had many nights when he got little or no sleep. Jacob reminded Laban that he had worked for him that way for twenty years. He had worked fourteen of those years for the two daughters of Laban. Then, he had worked six additional years for wages. During that time, Laban had changed his wages ten times.

Jacob said that God had been with him throughout this time. He also said that He followed the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac. Up to this point in this rebuke, Jacob did not make charges against Laban. However, he now expressed one fear that he felt. He said that he feared that Laban would have sent him away with nothing after those twenty years of faithful work. Laban did not deny that charge, so it is possible that if Jacob had not left while Laban was away shearing the sheep that Laban would have tried to send him away with nothing. Then, Jacob said, “God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked *you* last night.” Here, we see that it was necessary for God to rebuke Laban to protect Jacob from him. The Lord knew that Jacob had been a man of integrity. He had done what was right even though Laban deceived him and changed his wages ten times. This is an important lesson we want to show our physical and spiritual children. We want to show the importance of doing what is right in the sight of God, regardless of whether others treat us fairly or not. We also want to help our children learn to continue to love the sinner even though that person may be guilty of sin just as Laban had been guilty. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to respond with love, even to those who sin against them.