

**GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 24 (30:25 – 31:55): Some Summary Thoughts:**

As we continue to work our way through the “Jacob cycle,” Scripture continues to open our eyes on several levels. As we noted last week, one level is the “physical” level in which the characters most definitely interact with all human emotions and human foibles. Jacob lives up to his name as “heel grabber” or “conniver;” Laban matches and even exceeds Jacob in his own brand of deceit. In fourteen years together, Jacob gains 2 wives, 2 handmaids, and ultimately 12 children. In this lesson, he will also gain flocks, female and male servants, camels and donkeys (30:43). Per God’s instruction, Jacob is now ready to separate from his uncle’s household. He prepares to return to the “promised land” (31:13, 18).

On a spiritual level, even more fascinating things are occurring. As we recall, Jacob had his own “conversion” experience en route out of the “promised land” when he accepted God as his own personal God, albeit with several conditions (28:20-21). What remains is for Jacob to learn to become “set apart” to God in full, not conditional, trust. Thus, Jacob undergoes a fairly lengthy “sanctification” process (not unlike all of us) where he (like we) must learn to put *full trust in God* to guide and empower us in service to Him and credit God for the blessings He bestows. Two literary ring composition chapter organizational structures reveal Jacob’s movement from *deceiver to reconciler*, and his transformation from *grasper to giver* as he and his kinsman, Laban, learn to credit God for the blessings they now richly enjoy. In all of this, God remains with Jacob, protecting him, per God’s promise to Jacob in his dream (28:15). Thus, we see:

- (A) Prologue (25:19-24)
  - (B) Isaac and the Canaanites: Conflict and Covenant (26)
  - (C) JACOB AND ESAU: DECEPTION (27)
  - (D) Bethel: Departure from promised land (28:10-22)
  - (E) Jacob and Laban: Deception and Reconciliation (29-31)**
  - (D) Mananaim: Return to promised land (32:1-2)
  - (C) JACOB AND ESAU: RECONCILIATION (32-33)
  - (B) Jacob and the Canaanites: Deception and Enmity (34)
  - (A) The Edomites (36)
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- (A) Jacob arrives in Haran (meets Laban) (29:1-14)
- (B) Jacob and Laban make a contract (29:15-20)
- (C) Laban deceives Jacob (29:21-30)
- (D) The birth of Jacob’s 12 children (29:31-30:24) [God does prosper, per the blessing: a *multitude*]
- (C) Jacob tricks Laban (30:25-43) [flocks increase]
- (B) Jacob and Laban dispute (31:17-24) [God promises presence & orders Jacob to return, vv. 3,13]
- (A) Jacob departs from Laban (Haran) (31:43-54) [Jacob credits God, v.42; Laban concurs/covenants, v 44]

In 14 years, Jacob has become a “people.” Per God’s guidance (31:13), he prepares to return to people the “promised land,” asking Laban that he be allowed to take that which was part of their contract, i.e., his wives and children. Laban counters. By divination, he realizes his success results from Jacob’s presence (30:27) and offers Jacob wages to stay. Jacob counters back, not wishing to be indebted to Laban, by saying he will take nothing of value from Laban. He will continue to care for Laban’s flocks, taking only those goats and sheep that have no value – the runts and those that produce mediocre wool (speckled and spotted).

Engaging in a selective breeding process that Jacob later reveals came from God (31:10-12), Jacob thrives, despite Laban’s attempts to hamper his efforts by isolating the valueless animals 3 days distant from the main flock. In consultation with his wives (31:14-15), Jacob determines to depart while Laban and his sons are 3 days distant. The one major mysterious element is Rachel’s decision to steal Laban’s household gods (*teraphim*) – small figurines often kept in a dwelling place to keep it from harm. When confronted by Laban regarding the theft, Jacob rightly expresses outrage since he knows nothing of the action, pointing out that in all his actions toward Laban, he acted in good faith. Verses 31:36-42 express Jacob’s transformed attitude as he credits God for all that he now has and now is!

So why Rachel’s theft? Some suggest she is an avid worshipper of these “gods”; thus, took them with her. Others say the theft (particularly her sitting on them during her menstrual cycle to cover up the theft) show complete disregard for the idols. Her actions demonstrated that these gods were powerless in the presence of the God of Jacob. Regardless, Jacob and his family and flocks depart and Jacob and Laban covenant together to keep peace between them. The stage is set for the reconciler/giver to enter the land of promise!