

Dr. Kenneth Mathews, Genesis, Session 18, Jacob and Laban (Gen. 29-31) Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathews, Genesis, Session 18, Jacob and Laban (Gen. 29-31), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Kenneth Mathews' Genesis session 18 examines Jacob and Laban's relationship, covering Genesis chapters 29-31. The lecture analyzes Jacob's escape from Esau, his deceitful dealings with Laban, and the subsequent conflict and reconciliation between them. **Key themes** include Jacob's evolving faith despite hardship, Laban's repeated deceptions, and God's overarching plan despite the characters' flaws. **The narrative explores** how God works through flawed individuals, using their experiences to further His purposes, ultimately highlighting God's faithfulness and mercy. The session concludes with a preview of the next lesson, focusing on Jacob's reconciliation with Esau.

**2. 11 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Mathews, Genesis, Session 18 – Double click icon to play
in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org
[BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old
Testament → Pentateuch → Genesis).**



**Mathews_Genesis_
Session18.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Mathews, Genesis, Session 18, Jacob and Laban (Gen. 29-31)

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from Dr. Kenneth Mathews' lecture on Genesis 29-31, focusing on the relationship between Jacob and Laban:

Briefing Document: Genesis 29-31 - Jacob and Laban

Introduction: This session focuses on Genesis chapters 29-31, which detail Jacob's experiences in Paddan Aram with his uncle Laban. The narrative is framed by two instances of fleeing: Jacob's flight from Esau (chapter 29) and his eventual flight from Laban (chapter 31). These chapters highlight a period of significant struggle, deception, and ultimately, God's continued faithfulness to Jacob despite his and others' flaws. A key element is the tension between God's promises to Jacob and the challenging circumstances he faces.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Fleeing as a Framing Device:

- The narrative is bookended by two flights: Jacob fleeing Esau's wrath to Laban's house, and then Jacob fleeing Laban's oppression. This highlights the lack of refuge or security Jacob finds in Haran, despite his family connection.
- Quote: "...how these three chapters, 29, 30, and 31, are marked on the outside by fleeing. In the case of chapter 29, he flees from his brother Esau, who is out to kill him. Then, in chapter 31, he flees from his uncle Laban because of the oppression that he experiences there."
- Instead of improvement, Jacob's situation with Laban becomes more destructive than before.

1. The Importance of Bethel:

- God's appearance to Jacob at Bethel (chapter 28) is recalled in chapter 31, highlighting a foundational moment in Jacob's personal relationship with God.
- God identifies himself as "the God of Bethel" (31:13), reminding Jacob of his vow and reinforcing his promise to bring Jacob back to his native land.
- Bethel is presented as a place of religious significance throughout Israel's history.

- Quote: "And he says in 13, I am the God of Bethel where you anointed a pillar. Remember that he took the stone either under his head or beside his head where he lay to sleep. And, uh, he set it up as a pillar, a place of, uh, recognition of God's presence and then continuing and where you made a vow to me, this was a vow of faith..."

1. **Deception and Struggle:**

- The narrative is characterized by "deception upon deception" just like Jacob and Esau's relationship, highlighting the moral failures of the family.
- The initial hope for a positive outcome is thwarted by the deceptive practices of Laban.
- Jacob's deception is mirrored by Laban's deception, demonstrating that the "deceiver" becomes the "deceived".
- Quote: "...there is deception upon deception. And just as we saw in the womb between Jacob and Esau, where there was a struggle, we'll find that there is a struggle now between Jacob and Laban and competition between Leah and Rachel."
- Struggles occur between Jacob and Laban, Leah and Rachel, and the daughters and their father.

1. **Jacob's Labor and Laban's Mistreatment:**

- Jacob works for Laban for a total of 20 years (7 for Leah, 7 for Rachel, and 6 for his own wages).
- Laban repeatedly cheats Jacob, changing his wages 10 times (a number signifying wholeness), but God does not allow him to harm Jacob.
- Quote: "Yet, he says in verse seven, your father has cheated me by changing my wages 10 times. 10 is probably the word that reflects the number that reflects the idea of completeness or wholeness."
- Jacob is incredibly diligent and faithful in his work. God blesses him despite Laban's unfair practices by increasing his flocks.

1. **God's Sovereignty and Faithfulness:**

- Despite Jacob's and Laban's deceitful actions, God remains sovereign and works out his purposes through them.

- God blesses Jacob, resulting in his wealth and large family, which was promised to Abraham.
- God's faithfulness is evident in Jacob's increased wealth, despite Laban's attempts to cheat him.
- Quote: "So, we see, again, that he's placing his trust and faith in the Lord to intercede on his behalf, in accord with God's promise."
- Quote: "However, God has not allowed him to harm me."
- The narrative demonstrates that God's promises are not dependent on the patriarchs' perfect behavior, but rather his grace and strength.

1. **Procreation, Wealth, and Land:**

- While procreation and wealth are not the source of conflict, the key issue is that Jacob is not in the Promised Land.
- The rivalry between Leah and Rachel over bearing children is a significant plot element.
- The use of maidservants to bear children reflects the cultural practices of the time.
- Ultimately, the 12 sons born to Jacob become the progenitors of the 12 tribes of Israel.
- Quote: "And the tension, unlike with Jacob and, excuse me, Abraham and Isaac, where there was the tension of procreation, we will find that Jacob will have many children. Procreation is not the problem. And he will become very wealthy. But where is the problem? The problem is he's not in the land."

1. **Family Dysfunction and God's Greater Plan:**

- The lecture emphasizes the dysfunctional nature of the patriarchal family.
- God's ability to work through flawed people for a greater purpose is central to the passage.
- Jacob's suffering and failures are not isolated incidents but are part of God's overarching plan to shape his character.
- Quote: "And they were, no question about it. And you can say, how terrible is this for the way that the patriarchs and those related to them suffer? They suffer all

kinds of sinful planning, deception, wickedness, and things of that sort. But what we will find is, as I was just saying, God, can still use this to mold and make Jacob a man of greater faith and a deeper and more intensive relationship with God."

- The events must be understood within the larger narrative of God's plan to avoid misinterpretation.
- This Old Testament narrative mirrors the New Testament understanding of how God uses challenges to transform people and deepen their relationship with Him through Christ.

1. **The Importance of Dreams:**

- Dreams function as a critical form of communication from God, to patriarchs and even those who are not part of God's promise.
- Quote: "And so, we find that he describes in verse 10 of chapter 31, a dream. And we will find repeatedly these dreams that come to pass, and this is the means by which God speaks to the patriarchs, as well as even those who are not of the appointed seed and promise of God."
- Jacob's dream in 31:10 shows how the mating of the animals is being influenced by God.
- God speaks to Laban in a dream, preventing him from harming Jacob, and again showing God's protection of Jacob.

1. **The Household Gods:**

- Rachel steals her father's household gods when they flee.
- The significance of these gods is not entirely clear, but they may have been connected to inheritance rights or ancestral worship.
- Quote: "Now, the household gods, we don't know precisely the significance that they have. But we do know that household gods ancestral gods were ones that could be used as an assurance of an inheritance if you possess the household gods."

1. **The Peace Treaty:**

- Jacob confronts Laban, and they make a covenant of peace marked by a stone pillar, a heap of stones, and a sacrificial meal.

- God's involvement is invoked in the oath using "the God of Abraham" and "the fear of Isaac" as references to the same deity.
- Quote: "So, if there's any transgression in their arrangement of peace, not to take advantage or violence against one or the other, then God will adjudicate that."
- The "fear of Isaac" is an effect placed for the cause, God, due to Isaac's fear of God.
- The peace treaty is a form of reconciliation between the descendants of Abraham and Nahor.

Conclusion:

Chapters 29-31 of Genesis depict a turbulent and complex period in Jacob's life. While marked by deception and struggle, these chapters ultimately illustrate God's faithfulness and sovereignty in working out his purposes through imperfect individuals. God's promise to Jacob and his ancestors remains true, with Jacob experiencing increases in family and wealth. The resolution of conflict between Jacob and Laban sets the stage for future challenges and transformations in Jacob's relationship with God and his family. This story teaches us that God is active and involved despite all the difficulties, even using flawed individuals to achieve His ultimate plan.

4. Study Guide: Mathews, Genesis, Session 18, Jacob and Laban (Gen. 29-31)

Genesis 29-31: Jacob and Laban Study Guide

Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. Why did Jacob initially travel to Paddan Aram?
2. What was the significance of Bethel in Jacob's journey?
3. Describe the initial agreement between Jacob and Laban regarding marriage.
4. How did Laban deceive Jacob, and what were the consequences of this deception?
5. What was the primary source of tension between Leah and Rachel?
6. What is the significance of the mandrakes in the narrative?
7. How did Laban attempt to manipulate the agreement about Jacob's wages, and what was Jacob's response?
8. Why did Jacob decide to leave Laban, and what did he take with him?
9. How did Rachel's actions further complicate Jacob's departure from Laban?
10. What was the purpose and significance of the covenant that Laban and Jacob made before Jacob's departure?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Jacob traveled to Paddan Aram to escape his brother Esau's wrath and to seek a wife from his mother's family. This was a journey to find refuge and fulfill the family legacy.
2. Bethel was the place where God revealed himself to Jacob in a dream, establishing a personal relationship between them. This site was named the "house of God" and became a place of religious importance in Jacob's life and in Israel's history.
3. Jacob agreed to work for Laban for seven years in exchange for the hand of Laban's younger daughter, Rachel, in marriage. This reflected a bride-price custom within the time period.

4. Laban deceived Jacob by substituting his older daughter, Leah, for Rachel on the wedding night. This led Jacob to work for an additional seven years to marry Rachel and created a rivalry between the sisters.
5. The primary source of tension between Leah and Rachel was their competition to bear children for Jacob. This was influenced by societal views and created further strife in the family dynamic.
6. Mandrakes were believed to be an aphrodisiac that could increase fertility, causing Leah and Rachel to scheme over their use. The narrator emphasizes that ultimately, God controls who has children.
7. Laban changed Jacob's wages 10 times, a number that signifies completeness and totality, to continually disadvantage him, and sent his sons to remove the speckled animals Jacob was due. In response, Jacob used folk wisdom and God's providence to increase his flock.
8. Jacob decided to leave Laban because he recognized Laban's increasingly hostile attitude and the mistreatment he had experienced. Jacob had also been directed by God to return to his homeland, Canaan.
9. Rachel's theft of her father's household gods further complicated Jacob's departure and led to a confrontation between Jacob and Laban. Rachel thought that possession of these gods might secure inheritance and prove her lineage.
10. The covenant Laban and Jacob made served to establish a peace agreement between them and included a pillar and a heap of stones as witnesses, a solemn oath, and a shared meal, with God as the final judge if the oath was broken.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the role of deception and manipulation in the relationship between Jacob and Laban. How do these actions impact their respective families and the fulfillment of God's promises?
2. Explore the theme of divine intervention and providence throughout Genesis 29-31. How does God's role impact Jacob's life, including his relationships, family, and wealth?
3. Discuss the significance of the various dreams in this section of Genesis. How do they function as a form of divine communication, and what role do they play in shaping the narrative?
4. Compare and contrast the characters of Jacob and Laban. How do their individual personalities and actions contribute to the conflicts and resolutions within the narrative?
5. How does the narrative in Genesis 29-31 reveal God's plan for Jacob, and how does it connect to the larger narrative of the Old Testament?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Paddan Aram:** The region in Mesopotamia where Jacob's mother, Rebekah, was from, and the place where Jacob flees to, finding his wives.
- **Bethel:** A place of significant religious importance for Jacob; means "house of God". This is where he dreams of a stairway to heaven.
- **Laban:** Rebekah's brother and Jacob's uncle, father to Leah and Rachel, who repeatedly deceives Jacob.
- **Leah:** Laban's older daughter, whom Jacob was tricked into marrying.
- **Rachel:** Laban's younger daughter, whom Jacob truly loved and worked for in order to marry.
- **Bride Price:** The payment, often through service, that Jacob provided Laban for his wives in accordance with ancient customs.
- **Household Gods:** (Teraphim) The family gods that were thought to bring good fortune, inheritance rights, and prosperity; stolen by Rachel.
- **Mandrake:** A plant believed to have aphrodisiac properties, which was used in the narrative to increase chances of bearing children.
- **Covenant:** A solemn agreement between two or more parties, often sealed with an oath and/or sacrifice, in this case, between Laban and Jacob.
- **Fear of Isaac:** A term used to describe God, referring to the effect of his presence in Isaac's life and the fear he inspired in him due to his power and holiness.
- **Divination:** An attempt to discover hidden knowledge or to predict the future, usually by mechanical means, as seen with Laban.
- **Aramean:** An inhabitant of Aram, a region in Mesopotamia, with Laban being one.
- **Gilead:** The hill country northeast of the Sea of Galilee that Jacob crosses as he moves towards his home in Canaan.

5. FAQs on Mathews, Genesis, Session 18, Jacob and Laban (Gen. 29-31), Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Jacob, Laban, and the Journey to Canaan (Genesis 29-31)

- Why did Jacob flee to Paddan Aram, and what was the significance of this location?** Jacob fled to Paddan Aram, specifically to the town of Haran, to escape his brother Esau's anger after deceiving Isaac. Paddan Aram was the home of Jacob's uncle, Laban, and also held symbolic importance as the location where Abraham's servant found Rebekah, Isaac's wife, signifying a continuation of God's covenantal plan.
- How did Jacob's experience in Haran differ from what one might expect given God's promises?** Despite God's promises and the initial promise of a better arrangement, Jacob's experience in Haran was marked by deception and struggle, especially with Laban. He was tricked into marrying Leah instead of Rachel and was repeatedly exploited. This was a stark contrast to the expectation that he would immediately experience the blessings God had promised. It also highlights how God's purposes and promises do not negate the difficult circumstances one may encounter.
- What role did God's personal relationship with Jacob play during his time with Laban?** Even though Jacob faces deception and mistreatment, God's relationship with him was continuously developing. God reminded him of his vow at Bethel and called him back to his homeland, a personal and direct interaction that built on Jacob's previous experience with God (the ladder dream), affirming a personal commitment and ongoing relationship. God also actively intervened to bless Jacob despite Laban's attempts to cheat him, demonstrating that God's faithfulness is not dependent on Jacob's perfection.
- How did Laban manipulate and deceive Jacob, and how did Jacob react?** Laban deceived Jacob by substituting Leah for Rachel on their wedding night and by repeatedly changing Jacob's wages. Jacob reacted initially by continuing to work diligently under unfair conditions. However, as Laban's hostility grew, Jacob's faith in God increased. Ultimately, Jacob became a victim of the very deception he was known for (in his dealings with Esau and Isaac). He ultimately recognizes Laban's dishonesty and works to outsmart him using local practices and God's help.

- **Why was there so much tension and rivalry between Leah and Rachel?** The tension between Leah and Rachel stemmed from their desire to bear Jacob's children. Rachel was initially infertile, while Leah was not loved by Jacob but given children by God to bless her. This led to a competitive environment, where each sister sought to gain favor with Jacob through children and even resorting to using their maidservants as surrogates.
- **How did God use the cultural practices of the time to achieve his purposes for Jacob's increase in wealth and children?** God worked within the limitations and cultural practices of the time, such as using the local custom of peeled branches to influence the color of livestock and the use of maidservants as surrogates. Although Jacob and the women utilized these practices with self-interest in mind, God used them to carry out his larger plans. This shows God's grace in utilizing human actions, even flawed ones, to fulfill his promises.
- **What led to Jacob's decision to leave Laban, and how did that departure unfold?** Jacob decided to leave Laban because of Laban's increasing hostility, the jealousy of Laban's sons, and God's direct command to return to his homeland. The departure was characterized by secrecy and deception on Jacob's part. He left without informing Laban, and Rachel stole her father's household gods. This underscores the theme of deception and the ongoing struggle within Jacob's family even in obedience to God.
- **How did the reconciliation between Jacob and Laban take place, and what was the significance of their covenant?** Although Laban pursued Jacob to confront him, the tensions de-escalated due to God's intervention in Laban's dream. The two entered into a covenant marked by a heap of stones, a pillar, and a sacrificial meal. The oath was a formal commitment to peace, recognizing the authority of the "God of Abraham" and the "fear of Isaac", which are different ways of referring to God within their lineage, ensuring a peaceful separation. This act was a formal recognition and a resolution to conflict before God.