



Laban

Life Was Filled With
Self Achievement

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Overview

LABAN'S WHOLE LIFE WAS STAMPED BY SELF-CENTEREDNESS

Laban's story is told in Genesis 24:1-31:55.

Were all selfish, but some of us have a real corner on the weakness. Laban's whole life was stamped by self-centeredness. His chief goal was to look out for himself. The way he treated others was controlled by that goal.

He made profitable arrangements for his sister Rebekah's marriage to Isaac and used his daughter's lives as bargaining chips. Jacob eventually outmaneuvered Laban, but the older man was unwilling to admit defeat.

His hold on Jacob was broken, but he still tried to maintain some kind of control by getting Jacob to promise to be gone for good. He realized that Jacob and Jacob's God were more than he could handle.

On the surface, we may find it difficult to identify with Laban. But his selfishness is one point we have in common.

Like him, we often have a strong tendency to control people and events to our benefit. Our "good" reasons for treating others the way we do may simply be a thin cover on our self-centered motives.

We may not even recognize our own selfishness. One way to discover it is to examine our willingness to admit we're wrong.

Laban could not bring himself to do this. If you ever amaze yourself by what you say and do to avoid facing up to wrong actions, you are getting a glimpse of your selfishness in action. Recognizing selfishness is painful, but it is the first step on the road back to God.

Son of Bethuel

Genesis 28:5

So Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Paddan-aram to stay with his uncle Laban, his mother's brother, the son of Bethuel the Aramean.

Jacob meets Rebekah.

Genesis 24:15

As he was still praying, a young woman named Rebekah arrived with a water jug on her shoulder. Her father was Bethuel, who was the son of Abraham's brother Nahor and his wife, Milcah.

Rebekah had physical beauty, but the servant was looking for a sign of inner beauty. Appearance is important to us, and we spend time and money improving it. But how much effort do we put into developing our inner beauty? Patience, kindness, and joy are the beauty treatments that help us become truly lovely—on the inside.

Receives the servant of Abraham

Genesis 24:29-33

Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban. [30] When he saw the nose-ring and the bracelets on his sister's wrists, and when he heard her story, he rushed out to the spring, where the man was still standing beside his camels. Laban said to him,

"Come and stay with us, you who are blessed by the Lord. Why do you stand here outside the village when we have a room all ready for you and a place prepared for the camels!"

So the man went home with Laban, and Laban unloaded the camels, gave him straw to bed them down, fed them, and provided water for the camel drivers to wash their feet.

Then supper was served. But Abraham's servant said, "I don't want to eat until I have told you why I have come."

"All right," Laban said, "tell us your mission."

Receives Jacob, and gives him his daughters in marriage

Genesis 29:12-30

He explained that he was her cousin on her father's side, her aunt Rebekah's son. So Rachel quickly ran and told her father, Laban.

As soon as Laban heard about Jacob's arrival, he rushed out to meet him and greeted him warmly. Laban then brought him home, and Jacob told him his story. "Just think, my very own flesh and blood!" Laban exclaimed.

After Jacob had been there about a month, Laban said to him, "You shouldn't work for me without pay just because we are relatives. How much do you want?"

Now Laban had two daughters: Leah, who was the oldest, and her younger sister, Rachel. Leah had pretty eyes, but Rachel was beautiful in every way, with a lovely face and shapely figure.

Since Jacob was in love with Rachel, he told her father, "I'll work for you seven years if you'll give me Rachel, your younger daughter, as my wife."

"Agreed!" Laban replied. "I'd rather give her to you than to someone outside the family."

So Jacob spent the next seven years working to pay for Rachel. But his love for her was so strong that it seemed to him but a few days. Finally, the time came for him to marry her. "I have fulfilled my contract," Jacob said to Laban. "Now give me my wife so we can be married."

So Laban invited everyone in the neighborhood to celebrate with Jacob at a wedding feast. That night, when it was dark, Laban took Leah to Jacob, and he slept with her. And Laban gave Leah a servant, Zilpah, to be her maid.

But when Jacob woke up in the morning—it was Leah! "What sort of trick is this?" Jacob raged at Laban. "I worked seven years for Rachel. What do you mean by this trickery?"

"It's not our custom to marry off a younger daughter ahead of the firstborn," Laban replied. "Wait until the bridal week is over, and you can have Rachel, too—that is, if you promise to work another seven years for me."

So Jacob agreed to work seven more years. A week after Jacob had married Leah, Laban gave him Rachel, too. And Laban gave Rachel a servant, Bilhah, to be her maid. So Jacob slept with Rachel, too, and he loved her more than Leah. He then stayed and worked the additional seven years.

It was the custom of the day for a man to present a dowry, or substantial gift, to the family of his future wife. This was to compensate the family for the loss of the girl.

Jacob's dowry was not a material possession, for he had none to offer. Instead he agreed to work seven years for Laban. But there was another custom of the land that Laban did not tell Jacob.

The older daughter had to be married first. By giving Jacob Leah and not Rachel, Laban tricked him into promising another seven years of hard work.

People often wonder if working a long time for something they desire is worth it. Jacob worked seven years to marry Rachel. After being tricked, he agreed to work seven more years for her (although he did get to marry Rachel shortly after he married Leah)!

The most important goals and desires are worth working and waiting for. Movies and television have created the illusion that people have to wait only about an hour to solve their problems or get what they want.

Don't be trapped into thinking the same is true in real life. Patience is hardest when we need it the most, but it is the key to achieving our goals.

Jacob was enraged when he learned that Laban had tricked him. The deceiver of Esau was now deceived himself. How natural it is for us to become upset at an injustice done to us while closing our eyes to the injustices we do to others. Sin has a way of coming back to haunt us.

Although Laban tricked Jacob, he kept his part of the bargain. There was more at stake than just Jacob's hurt. There was Rachel to think about, as well as God's plan for his life. When others trick us, keeping our part of the bargain may still be wise. Nursing our wounds or plotting revenge makes us unable to see from God's perspective.

Jacob becomes his servant

Genesis 29:15-20

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Outwitted by Jacob

Genesis 30:37-43

Now Jacob took fresh shoots from poplar, almond, and plane trees and peeled off strips of the bark to make white streaks on them.

Then he set up these peeled branches beside the watering troughs so Laban's flocks would see them as they came to drink, for that was when they mated.

So when the flocks mated in front of the white-streaked branches, all of their offspring were streaked, speckled, and spotted.

Jacob added them to his own flock, thus separating the lambs from Laban's flock. Then at mating time, he turned the flocks toward the streaked and dark-colored rams in Laban's flock. This is how he built his flock from Laban's.

Whenever the stronger females were ready to mate, Jacob set up the peeled branches in front of them.

But he didn't do this with the weaker ones, so the weaker lambs belonged to Laban, and the stronger ones were Jacob's.

As a result, Jacob's flocks increased rapidly, and he became very wealthy, with many servants, camels, and donkeys.

There was a belief among herdsmen that vivid impressions at mating time influenced the offspring. Most likely, the selective breeding and God's promise of provision were the main reasons that Jacob's flocks increased.

**Laban pursues Jacob, overtakes him at Mount Gilead,
and covenants with him**

Gen 31:1-21

Jacob Departs Secretly

The affairs of these families are related very minutely, while (what are called) the great events of states and kingdoms at that period, are not mentioned.

The Bible teaches people the common duties of life, how to serve God, how to enjoy the blessings he bestows, and to do good in the various stations and duties of life. Selfish men consider themselves robbed of all that goes past them, and covetousness will even swallow up natural affection.

Men's overvaluing worldly wealth is that error which is the root of covetousness, envy, and all evil. The men of the world stand in each other's way, and everyone seems to be taking away from the rest; hence discontent, envy, and discord.

But there are possessions that will suffice for all; happy they who seek them in the first place. In all our removals we should have respect to the command and promise of God. If He be with us, we need not fear. The perils, which surround us, are so many, that nothing else can really encourage our hearts.

To remember favored seasons of communion with God, is very refreshing when in difficulties; and we should often recollect our vows, that we fail not to fulfill them.

Jacob's wealth made Laban's sons jealous. It is sometimes difficult to be happy when others are doing better than we are. To compare our success with that of others is a dangerous way to judge the quality of our lives. By comparing ourselves to others, we may be giving jealousy a foothold. We can avoid jealousy by rejoicing in others' successes (see Romans 12:15).

Although Laban treated Jacob unfairly, God still increased Jacob's prosperity. God's power is not limited by lack of fair play. He has the ability to meet our needs and make us thrive even though others mistreat us. To give in and respond unfairly is to be no different from your enemies.

Laban Pursues Jacob

Genesis 31:22-35

God can put a bridle in the mouth of wicked men, to restrain their malice, though he do not change their hearts. Though they have no love to God's people, they will pretend to it, and try to make a merit of necessity.

Foolish Laban! To call those things his gods which could be stolen! Enemies may steal our goods, but not our God. Here Laban lays to Jacob's charge things that he knew not. Those who commit their cause to God, are not forbidden to plead it themselves with meekness and fear.

When we read of Rachel's stealing her father's images, what a scene of iniquity opens! The family of Nahor, who left the idolatrous Chaldees; is this family itself become idolatrous?

It is even so. The truth seems to be, that they were like some in after-times, who swore by the Lord and by Malcham, Zep 1:5; and like others in our times, who wish to serve both God and mammon.

Great numbers will acknowledge the true God in words, but their hearts and houses are the abodes of spiritual idolatry. When a man gives himself up to covetousness, like Laban, the world is his god; and he has only to reside among gross idolaters in order to become one, or at least a favorer of their abominations.

Jacob was so sure that no one had stolen Laban's idols that he vowed to kill the offender. Because Rachel took them, this statement put her safety in serious jeopardy. Even when you are absolutely sure about a matter, it is safer to avoid rash statements. Someone may hold you to them.

Lessons from his life:

Those who set out to use people will eventually find themselves used
Gods plan cannot be blocked

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

Holy Bible: Living Bible Translation

Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print

Matthew Henry Concise Bible Commentary