

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: December 30, 2018
Lesson Title: "Home!"
Lesson Passage: Gen. 31:2-16

ABOUT THIS LESSON

Though the lesson title hints at Jacob's return to his homeland, the account of his actual departure doesn't appear until Gen. 31:17. This lesson is concerned primarily with his reasons for leaving his uncle and the father of his two wives, Laban. Our lesson passage highlights both the villainous nature of Laban's character and Jacob's pious dependence upon the God of his father, who has helped him accumulate considerable wealth at Laban's expense. A crucial step in Jacob's preparation for leaving Laban and returning home is the need to convince his wives that this is the right thing to do; for this will necessitate leaving their homeland.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Summarize Jacob's reasons for leaving Laban. (2) Cite biblical evidence that God was directing the course of Jacob's life.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Recall Jacob's original reason for leaving his home in southern Palestine and seeking refuge with his uncle Laban in Mesopotamia. (His brother, Esau, was out to kill him in retaliation for the theft of his birthright.) Then observe that, after Jacob had lived with him for more than 14 years, Laban was no longer hospitable. He had, in fact, become very vindictive in his attitude toward Jacob, although Jacob had married two of his daughters. And Laban's sons had now adopted their father's attitude toward Jacob (Gen. 31:1), probably because they saw this relative garnering some of their family wealth.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. As class members turn to Genesis 31:2-16, observe that the purpose and providence of God was now a major factor in the life of Jacob. To illustrate this, call attention to Genesis 31:3, 31:5b, 31:7b, 31:9, 31:11; and note that, in 31:13, God explicitly commands him to return to Palestine and fulfill the vow he had made at Bethel (*recall Gen. 28:20-22a*).

2. Read Gen. 31:1-2, and observe that Jacob was now feeling threatened by the kinsmen in whom he had found refuge several years earlier. Not only had he learned that Laban's sons had a hostile attitude toward him (31:1); he had been increasingly mistreated by Laban himself (vv. 2, 7). As Jacob had become more prosperous at Laban's expense (v. 9), his situation had grown increasingly

perilous. So, prompted by the warning of an angel in a dream (Genesis 31:10-13), he decided that he would rather face the wrath of Esau back home than risk further maltreatment by Laban and his sons.

3. Ask, "Why were the sons of Laban complaining that 'Jacob has taken all that was our father's; and from what was our father's he has gained all this wealth?' (Gen. 31:1). Summarize the writer's answer to this question in Gen. 30:25-42: Jacob tells Laban that, since he has fulfilled his obligation, he would like to go back to his homeland. Attempting to persuade Jacob to stay and work for him, Laban asks him to name his wages. Jacob proposes that he will care for Laban's livestock if he can be allowed to keep any speckled and spotted animals that might be born to Laban's normally solid-colored sheep and goats. Assuming that such oddly colored animals would appear very rarely, Laban readily agreed; and, to further reduce Jacob's profit, he removed all the odd-colored animals from his flocks and had his sons hide them in a distant place (30:35-36). But through clever breeding tactics, Jacob grew rich and built up an impressive personal estate (Gen. 30: 43).

4. Explain Jacob's meeting with his wives, as noted in Genesis 31:4: Jacob was not sure whether Leah and Rachel would follow him to his distant homeland. Although they were his wives by marriage, they still belonged to Laban's greater family (Genesis 31:31). NOTE: The larger family was called the "father's house" in Old Testament culture (note the terminology "our father's house" in v. 14). This confederation of kinsmen was the real owner of the land that was worked by individual families. To leave this family enterprise was highly unusual, and when a husband did so his departure was not necessarily binding on his wives, who had a strong connection with the property. Therefore, Jacob had to entice his wives to leave by persuasion rather than compulsion.

5. Observe that the response of Leah and Rachel is found in vv. 14-16: (1) They had already been excluded from sharing in possession of the land, for, contrary to the usual custom, their father had already used the bridal price for himself. (The value of Jacob's 14 years of service had not benefitted them at all.) Their father had, in fact, "sold them" into marriage, rather than guaranteeing them an inheritance in the family estate (v. 14). (2) So, since their own father has treated them like foreigners (v. 15), they might as well leave home and go with Jacob ("see their response in v. 16).

CLOSING THE LESSON

Preview the upcoming lessons: "Going home" is usually regarded as a happy experience. But as we follow Jacob's pilgrimage through the next two lessons, we'll see that his home-going was not entirely joyful. With a hostile uncle pursuing him, a supernatural opponent awaiting him and a vindictive brother confronting him, Jacob was in grave danger as he was homeward bound.