

GENESIS 31: JACOB'S PECULIAR DREAM

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One day, after tarrying 21 years in Haran, Jacob summons his wives Leah and Rachel to his field for a secret communication. He tells them that the time has come to return to the land of his fathers. He offers two reasons: Laban's sons have accused him of building up his wealth by taking it from their father. Furthermore, Laban's attitude toward him has now changed. Jacob then tells his wives about a dream that he has had:

Once, at the mating time of the flocks, I had a dream in which I saw that the he-goats, as they mated, were streaked, speckled, and mottled. And in the dream an angel of God said to me. "Jacob!" "Here I am," I answered. And he said, "Note well that all the he-goats in the flock which are mating are streaked, speckled, and mottled; for I have noted all that Laban has been doing to you. I am the God of Beth-el, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Up, then, leave this land and return to the land of your birth" (Gen. 31:10-13).

Why does the Torah go out of its way to tell us of this peculiar and rather unsavory dream? The purpose becomes clear when we compare this dream to another one that Jacob had 21 years earlier. While fleeing from Esau, Jacob had a dream at Beth-el of a ladder on which angels were ascending and descending. In that dream God offered him promises and reassurance. Now what is he dreaming about? – he-goats mating, and streaked, speckled, and mottled flocks!

Jacob, a man destined to be the father of a great nation, had under Laban's tutelage turned into a successful breeder of sheep and goats. The fact that the Lord introduced Himself in the dream as *the God of Beth-el* was a powerful reminder of the distressing change that had taken place in Jacob. The potential spiritual giant had become a master of animal husbandry.

This adds another layer of meaning to the statement *for I have noted all that Laban has been doing to you*. What, in fact, had Laban succeeded in doing to Jacob? Jacob had married his two daughters and was blessed with 11 sons. Laban tried to cheat Jacob, but never really succeeded. He had

repeatedly changed the conditions of Jacob’s service and the choice of sheep and goats as a reward for his labor; yet Jacob, by an uncanny genetic manipulation, had managed to outsmart Laban and become a wealthy man.

So the dream itself showed what Laban had done to Jacob. It was time for Jacob to return to his birthplace.¹

NOTES

1. See also Pinchas H. Peli, *Torah Today* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005) pp. 30-32.



עשה תורתך קבע

THE TRIENNIAL BIBLE READING CALENDAR
DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF CHAIM ABRAMOWITZ

October	Ezekiel	9 – 36
November	Ezekiel	37 – 48
	Hosea	1 – 14
	Joel	1 – 2
December	Joel	3 – 4
	Amos	1 – 9
	Obadiah	1
	Jonah	1 – 3
	Micah	1 – 7
	Nahum	1 – 3
	Habakkuk	1 – 3
January	Zephaniah	1 – 3
	Haggai	1 – 2
	Zechariah	1 – 14
	Malachi	1 – 3
	Psalms	1 – 5
February	Psalms	6 – 33

