

EXPOSITION OF GENESIS

Message #70

Genesis 31:17-55

WHEN A MAN PURPOSES TO OBEY GOD AND FOLLOW HIS LEADING, THINGS FROM THE OLD PAST MAY THREATEN AND INTIMIDATE HIM, BUT IF HE REMAINS FAITHFUL, HE WILL DISCOVER GOD WILL PROTECT HIM AND LEAD HIM.

Let us remember that we have seen the faithful servant, Jacob, get shafted by his unfaithful employer, Laban. Through hostile adversity (31:3, 11-13), through direct revelation (31:3; 11-13) and through a favorable response from his family (31:4-16), Jacob determined that it was the will of God for him to leave. But this world doesn't like to give up one of God's elect who purposes to do God's will so it comes after Jacob and if possible would destroy him, but behind this was the sovereign protective hand of God, carefully watching, guarding, directing and blessing this faithful servant. As W. H. Thomas said, "It is this that gives quietness amidst perplexities, and enables the soul to rest in faith until all is made clear" (*Genesis*, p. 289).

SEGMENT #1 - The obedience of Jacob. 31:17-18

As soon as Jacob knew it was God's will to leave and travel back to Canaan (31:13), he immediately obeyed.

SEGMENT #2 - The work of Laban. 31:19a

Laban had taken a personal interest in the sheep ever since he entered into the business deal with Jacob. The irony of this is that while he is all focused on his business, the one responsible for the success of his business is packing up and leaving. Laban was more interested in his sheep than he was the one bringing him the blessings of God.

SEGMENT #3 - The theft of Rachel. 31:19b-21

Laban had stolen wages from Jacob, now he was going to be robbed by his own daughter. The Hebrew word "teraphim" (gods or idols) occurs several times in O.T. These were typically small (not always) human figurines about 2-3 inches in length, most of which were female and were kept in the house or carried on the body as a charm.

(Event #1) - Rachel takes Laban's idols. 31:19b - Three possibilities as to why:
A. Rachel is an idolater who thinks these idols will protect them.
B. Rachel has key items that entitle her to her father's inheritance.
C. Rachel may use these for negotiation if they get caught.

(Event #2) - Jacob secretly leaves Laban. 31:20-21

Jacob doesn't steal anything and didn't know his wife had stolen something (31:32); he just leaves without telling Laban. Mt. Gilead was some 300 plus miles away.

SEGMENT #4 - Laban tracks Jacob. 31:22-23

The words “pursue” (v.23); “caught up” (v.25) and “camped” (v.25) are militaristic. As Dr. Kent Hughes observed, “Laban was on the warpath” (*Genesis*, p. 392).

When Laban learned Jacob had a three day head start, he pursued him with rapid speed. Laban caught up with Jacob in seven days, which means he traveled in seven days what it took Jacob ten days. Jacob must have averaged about 35 miles per day, but Laban moved at 50 miles per day.

SEGMENT #5 - God warns Laban. 31:24

Without this warning, Laban would have violently attacked his own family. God warns Laban that if he says or does anything that could prevent Jacob from fulfilling His will he would be doomed.

SEGMENT #6 - Laban catches and criticizes Jacob. 31:25-30

Laban catches up to Jacob and asks him several questions: 1) Why didn't you tell me you were leaving (31:26a)?; 2) Why did you act like a kidnapper (31:26b)?; 3) Why didn't you let me know so we could have had a wonderful “bon-voyage” party (31:27)?; 4) Why didn't you let me kiss my family goodbye (31:28 - “sons” refers to his grandsons)?; 5) Don't you realize that I have the power to hurt you (31:29)?; 6) Why have you stolen my “gods”? Laban is laying a huge guilt trip on Jacob because Jacob is doing the will of God. It is interesting that Laban claims that Jacob has acted foolishly (31:28), but **what Laban perceives as foolishness, God perceives as faithfulness.**

SEGMENT #7 - Jacob responds to Laban. 31:31-32

Jacob says the reason I didn't tell you is because you are such a deceitful man you may not have given me my wives. He thought Laban was making up a lie about his idols being stolen, so he said, “I'll execute any who stole those from you.”

SEGMENT #8 - Laban searches for his idols. 31:33-34

Laban conducts a search of every tent and turns up nothing.

SEGMENT #9 - Rachel deceives her father. 31:34-35

Rachel had put the idols in the camel's saddlebags and was sitting on the saddle. Rachel appealed to the fact that she was experiencing female menstruation. Now the reason that Laban doesn't make her get up is not because he is a concerned father, it is because he doesn't think she would ever do something so degrading as to sit on an idol in her condition.

SEGMENT #10 - Jacob gets angry with Laban. 31:36-42

Jacob had been a patient man, but twenty years of pent-up anger finally exploded and he basically says, let's examine the facts right here and right now. When the text says "Jacob became angry" (31:36), the word means he was burning with anger and his eyes and countenance showed it (Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 303). He had enough of Laban and lashes into him:

- 1) He demands to know what he did wrong (31:36);
- 2) He demands to know the real reason Laban is chasing him (31:36b);
- 3) He demands that all his people be permitted to choose who they want to live with (31:37);
- 4) He reminds Laban of his faithful service, his honesty, his sacrifices and Laban's dishonesty (31:37-41);
- 5) He reminds Laban of God's prosperity and protection of Jacob's life and his rebuke of Laban's life (31:42).

SEGMENT #11 - Laban negotiates peace with Jacob. 31:43-44, 48-52

Laban realizes Jacob is mad and desires to enter into a covenant of peace with him. As Hughes observed, these are "empty words coming from a hollow man" (*Genesis*, p. 394).

SEGMENT #12 - Jacob agrees to peace treaty with Laban. 31:45-46, 53-54

Jacob agreed to set his anger aside and Laban gave this place an Aramaic name – "Jegar-sahadutha" which in Hebrew is "Galeed" which means "the heap is witness" or "the heap is testimony."

In the end, God's will would be accomplished, but it was not an easy journey.

This is a great text of physical deliverance. But it doesn't even begin to compare to the spiritual deliverance any may have from the One who would come through Jacob's line. Jesus Christ will set one free from all sin and enter into an eternal peace treaty between a sinner and Holy God if one will believe on Him.