

GENESIS 31:43-55 (THE WITNESS AND THE WATCHTOWER)

Introduction: In the 13th century, the Christian philosopher Thomas Aquinas wrote the Summa Theologica, one of the greatest works ever on doctrines related to the many facets and workings of God, creation, man, divine government, and other things.

Each of these categories is subdivided into an astonishing array of wisdom and logic. One might think that the first premise he would have argued would be God - His existence, His nature, His attributes, etc. The Bible starts with creation, but from the premise that it is God who created - you'd think he'd do the same.

But he looked elsewhere to establish his arguments. Believe it or not, he started with The Nature and Domain of Sacred Doctrine. In other words, the Bible. Why would he do this? The answer is that until the nature and validity of the Bible can be determined, all the philosophy, logic, and reason in the world about God is irrelevant.

Without God's word, there can be no true understanding of our relationship to Him. He said that "because man is directed to God, as to an end that surpasses the grasp of his reason... that the end must first be known by men who are to direct their thoughts and actions to the end. Hence it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation."

Aquinas went on through ten articles addressing the nature of Sacred Scripture before continuing with the rest of the Summa. God's word is the single most important physical object on planet earth. Without it we cannot know Jesus and without Jesus we cannot be saved - and yet we ignore this book... to watch TV.

Today, we will review a passage which actually reveals God's intent to give the world a Bible and which even gives us clues about the nature and structure of the Bible that He will give. And it will show that God is watching over His word very carefully.

Text Verse: The word of the LORD came to me: “What do you see, Jeremiah?” “I see the branch of an almond tree,” I replied. ¹² The LORD said to me, “You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled.” Jeremiah 1:11, 12 (NIV)

God spoke His word to us through His prophets and apostles. In this word are promises, blessings, curses, and assurances. If one, yes if even one aspect of this word fails, then God has failed. The sacredness and reliability of this word is tied directly to His holiness and truthfulness and so... May God speak to us through His *word* today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. Laban's Loss

In the previous few sermons, we saw Jacob, by God's direction, determine to return to the land of Canaan. He left secretly and when his uncle found out, he in turn chased after Jacob and finally caught up with him.

On the night before they met, God appeared to him and told him that he was to do nothing harmful to Jacob. That next day, Laban met with Jacob, searched his tents for household idols that were stolen from him and then Jacob defended of his actions, including his innocence concerning the idols. This is where we start today...

⁴³ **And Laban answered and said to Jacob, “*These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and this flock is my flock; all that you see is mine.*”**

Jacob has fully defended himself against Laban and now Laban, without admitting any guilt or any wrongdoing toward Jacob, makes a great and boastful claim that everything in Jacob's possession was derived from him.

He is acting in a way that will allow him to seem generous in not insisting on keeping it all. Instead, he will allow Jacob to have it.

43(con't) But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne?

Laban has claimed that everything Jacob has now come from his wealth and that he is generous in allowing Jacob to keep it. His reason is that he simply couldn't find it in his heart to deprive his departing family of their well being.

His own daughters told Jacob before they left that Laban had treated them as strangers, but suddenly he claims they are so near and dear to him.

It needs to be remembered that Laban is in the presence of his own family members who he is going to return home with and so he is trying to make himself look good in their eyes and diminish Jacob's standing at the same time.

44 Now therefore, come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me.”

The separation is final and Laban realizes that. Jacob isn't coming back and everything is going with him. But just like six years earlier, Laban realized that God was with Jacob. In the past, he asked Jacob to stay and work for him and it has become completely evident that Jacob is blessed.

God has made him fruitful, powerful, and is his protector. If this is so, and because Laban has actually mistreated Jacob time and time again, it is a fear of Laban's that Jacob may determine to come back and take revenge on him for his bad treatment.

Because of this he asks for a covenant between the two. The covenant will be, as he says, a witness between them. If Jacob agrees, it is implied that all past quarrels will be forgotten and anything which is misplaced between them will be overlooked.

Instead, there will be an agreement of peace and good intention which will stand as a testimony between them, especially because it will be in the presence of God and all the witnesses. This covenant is so important that

God determined to record it by Moses' hand several hundred years later as a witness forever.

II. God is Witness

⁴⁵ So Jacob took a stone and set it up *as* a pillar.

In the verses which preceded Jacob's departure from the land of Canaan, Jacob set up a stone as a pillar. This was on the night after **he had his dream** concerning the ladder and which involved a promise of Jacob's protection.

Now in the verses which precede his return to Canaan, he sets up another pillar. This is coming after the night in which **Laban had a dream** from God concerning Jacob's protection. The symbolism shouldn't be missed - God promised protection to Jacob and it came, even in the form of a dream to rebuke Laban.

In the same way, God has promised that He will always preserve the people Israel who have descended from Jacob. This preservation of them, whether they deserved it or not, is based on His faithfulness and His ability to keep His word.

People that don't understand this can never realize the immense wonder which has occurred in this group of people throughout the ages. He has taken care of them despite all of the people who have continued to come against them, speak ill of them, and attempt to wipe them out.

God's hand is on them, just as His hand is upon the people of the church during this time of grace and blessing which we call the church age. Jacob's pillar is a testament to God's faithfulness. It also symbolizes Jacob's willingness to agree to Laban's proposed covenant.

⁴⁶ Then Jacob said to his brethren, "Gather stones." And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there on the heap.

In addition to the pillar, Jacob tells the gathered people to make a heap. The Hebrew word is *gal* and it would have been a circular heap which will serve two purposes. The first is a round table that they can use for dining and the second would be to remain there as an altar and a testimony to the covenant.

A meal is where the details are sorted out in life's problems. It is where foes become friends and where agreements are made. A meal is where we have to stop from our own labors and reflect on whatever situation is at hand.

By taking the time to sit and eat a meal, they will be able to sort out the problems which have arisen from the past and resolve them for the future. A meal is still where we meet with the Lord and proclaim His death until He comes again. It is where we leave aside our past and renew our determination for the future.

⁴⁷ Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed.

This is the very first time that a language other than Hebrew is used in the Bible. Laban's name of this round heap is Jegar Sahadutha which is an Aramaic, not a Hebrew word. In all, there will be about 250 verses which contain Aramaic out of about 31000 verses in the Bible.

Most of the Aramaic will be found in Nehemiah and Daniel, but there will be scattered words and sentences elsewhere. For example, one sentence in the book of Jeremiah suddenly appears in Aramaic, but everything else in the book is Hebrew.

There will even be a few times in the New Testament where the Greek is citing Aramaic, not Hebrew words. What this verse does for us is to show that the language of the land, the same land where Abraham came from, was Aramaic.

It is the language that Rebekah, Jacob's mother, would have spoken. Hebrew then is the language of Canaan which Abraham would have learned and adapted after moving there. Both languages are similar, but they evolved differently over the years.

Jacob calls the mound Galeed which means the same thing in Hebrew as Jegar Sahadutha in Aramaic. They both mean "Heap of Witness." By naming the mound in their own languages, it was a way of confirming that this covenant applied not only to them, but to their posterity after them.

⁴⁸ And Laban said, "This heap *is* a witness between you and me this day." Therefore its name was called Galeed,

The great Bible scholar Adam Clarke notes the irregular division of this verse and the next one and he disagrees with it. And so for a little diversion, I'll give you my thoughts on the Bible's verse divisions. From time to time things will be divided in odd places.

One chapter in Acts ends on a semi-colon, and there are other irregularities in how things appear to be arranged or divided in the Bible. The first words compiled in the Bible happened about 3500 years ago when Moses walked up Mount Sinai and received the Torah, the first five books of the Bible - aka Pentateuch.

After that, about 40 people were used of God to write portions of His word. Three languages are used as well. The final book to be received came about 1600 years after the time of Moses when John penned Revelation on the island of Patmos. Other than a few books, all of them were written by Hebrew people.

The Hebrew Bible is arranged differently than the Christian arrangement of the Old Testament. And it wasn't until around AD350 that the books of the New Testament were finally agreed on and arranged.

Two people in the 13th century took the time to divide the Bible into chapters. One was Archbishop Stephen Langton, the other was Cardinal Hugo de Sancto Caro. The divisions Langton made were the ones that continued to be used.

Then in 1551 Robert Stephanus divided the New Testament into individual verses and the divisions as we know them today were first published in the Geneva Bible of 1560.

Although this might seem like an unnecessary history lesson, the structure of the Bible, the arrangement of the books, the chapter divisions, and yes - even the verse divisions as we know them now, show a wisdom which transcends the 3000 years, forty human authors, other people of God, and three languages used in the compiling, structure, and publication of the modern Bible.

When we read these seemingly odd points of division, such as in the verse we're looking at right now, and which Adam Clarke didn't like, we should be careful to not find fault without searching for the patterns which are so beautifully revealed in what is given.

I tell you this because I believe that the divisions, even to the verse divisions, are divinely inspired by God. Patterns which are revealed through studying them shows this to be true. God's hand and His fingerprints are very clearly evident in His word.

Remember this and use care when you search its wonders and mysteries. Anyway, Laban acknowledges that the heap they ate at is a witness between the two parties. The Bible then goes on to say, "Therefore its name is called Galeed."

The meaning isn't evident in English, but the heap is the word *gal* and "witness" is the word *ed*. It comes from the verb 'ud, meaning to return or repeat. Basically, the idea is "to second a motion." Therefore the two are combined to provide the name Galeed.

⁴⁹ also Mizpah, because he said, "May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from another.

Mizpah means "watchtower" and if the name "heap of witness" is implying a covenant between the two, the name Mizpah is implying that the Lord is the One watching over the covenant.

He would be the one to stand as the judge over any transgressions of the agreement, just as we saw with the covenant between Abraham and Abimelech which occurred in their distant past.

Despite the age of these covenants, boundaries have been formed around the land and between the peoples of the surrounding lands. God continues to monitor what man has long ago forgotten. He stands at the watchtower ensuring the ancient covenants are kept. This book, the Bible, is a testament to His care about such things.

⁵⁰ If you afflict my daughters, or if you take *other* wives besides my daughters, *although* no man is with us—see, God is witness between you and me!”

Laban has determined to set parameters for the protection of his daughters as a part of the covenant. He is not allowing any additions to the family of Jacob in the form of wives. If you remember what Leah and Rachel picture from a previous sermon, then maybe you're starting to see the pattern here.

If not, I'll explain it in a few minutes. Jacob is bound to the two wives and God is a witness concerning this. In this verse he says that "no man is with us." This doesn't mean that they are off alone making this agreement.

Instead it's speaking of the future when there is no one to observe what either is doing. In that time, God will still be watching. I assure you, what this is alluding to is as important as any precept contained in the Bible. God is watching it and will hold offending parties to account.

III. A Sacrifice on the Mountain

⁵¹ Then Laban said to Jacob, “Here is this heap and here is *this* pillar, which I have placed between you and me.

Curiously Laban notes the heap and the pillar as if **he** had set them up. Earlier, it said that it was Jacob who set up the pillar and it was Jacob who directed the heap to be made and yet Laban claims that they were by him. Why would this be in the Bible?

Remember who Laban pictures, remember who his daughters picture, and then maybe you'll start to see why he is claiming the right to having placed the heap there. As always, these pictures are being given not as a one for one comparison, but they're designed to show how things will come about in the future.

This account between Jacob and Laban really happened and so God has shown it to us for His reasons. Keep searching what you already know and it will become clear. The heaps and the pillar were erected by Laban's consent although they were directed originally by Jacob.

⁵² This heap *is* a witness, and *this* pillar *is* a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm.

The heap and pillar witness to the peace between the two parties. There will be harmony between them as long as they don't pass beyond the boundaries which have been set in order to cause harm. If they are breeched, then the account is to be judiciously and righteously settled as the violation of a covenant.

⁵³ The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us." And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac.

The Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary notes about this verse, that "it is observable that there was a marked difference in the religious sentiments of the two. Laban spake of the God of Abraham and Nahor, their common ancestors; but Jacob, knowing that idolatry had crept in among that branch of the family, swore by the 'fear of his father Isaac.' They who have one God should have one heart: they who are agreed in religion should endeavor to agree in everything else."

In other words, Laban is still worshipping the God of their fathers. Abraham is Nahor's brother and their father is Terah. The problem with Laban's words is that in all of their lives, idolatry had crept in.

Joshua 24:2 says this: "And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Your fathers, *including* Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods."

Laban is confused about who God is and how to serve Him. Remember, he had household idols and yet he has also referred to the Lord, Jehovah during the covenant.

And so to stave off any hint of idolatry, Jacob swears by the same God, but uses the term "the Fear of his Father Isaac." Isaac is still alive and he walks in fear of his God. The God that he serves isn't the God of the dead, but of the living.

This is the same sentiment that is given by Jesus in Matthew 22. When questioned about a matter concerning the resurrection, Jesus corrected His listeners by saying, "But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, ³² 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

Jacob is doing the same thing to Laban now. God is alive and is to be feared, not placed as a God of the dead along with a household full of idols. His word is everlasting and His eyes watch over it and the covenants it contains for all time. If all of this seems trivial, I can assure you it's not.

⁵⁴ Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread. And they ate bread and stayed all night on the mountain.

The confirmation of the agreement is made by a sacrifice on the mountain and the eating of bread. Is this anything you've read elsewhere in the Bible? Are you reading your Bible? Are you trying to take what you know and weave it together right now? If so, I know the Lord is smiling on your efforts.

If not, then why not? Has God put these stories in here so that we can read

and forget them? Or are they here to tell us about things that are irrelevant to anything except the life of Jacob and Laban?

Never stop asking the word to speak back to you. It is alive and active - sharper than any two-edged sword and it will awaken your soul if you will let it.

⁵⁵ And early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place.

It can be inferred from what God said to Laban on the night before he met up with Jacob that he intended to do harm to him and his family. At a minimum, he came with the intent to call down curses on Jacob which would in turn be considered a curse upon the family, but now he kisses his family and blesses them.

Just as God vowed to Abraham and to Isaac and which is passed on to Jacob, we read these words from Genesis 12 -

"I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (v 3)

God turned the curse into a blessing and so we can assume that when Laban departed and went to his place that He was blessed for the blessing he gave.

Now that we've looked at the surface of the story, the historical and cultural aspects of what happened, we need to ask ourselves, "Why is this story here? What is it that God wants us to see? The answer is, as always - Jesus." Here is the Light -

Laban pictures the man of the world, Jacob pictures the Lord. Laban came to Jacob and claimed that the daughters, family, and flock were his. Remember, Leah pictures the law and Rachel pictures grace. We've seen this time and again. The flock is the church, the children are the people Israel.

Laban is making a claim to them based on the fact that they all came from him. And this is true, they did. In the same way, the Law was penned by a man, Moses, even though it was given under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And what Jeremiah wrote came from Jeremiah and it bears his unique style and wording.

The same is true with the New Testament. When we read Paul, we can tell his style and yet it bears the same unique mark of God. The things Laban said came from him really did, even though they are also Jacob's. The word of God, the church, and the people of Israel all came through man and yet they are God's. EXPLAIN INSPIRATION AS INSTRUMENTS

Laban offers to make a covenant and it will stand as a witness. Jacob then sets up a pillar, but later Laban claims he set up the pillar. What is the pillar? It is the same symbolism as the pillar back in chapter 28. The pillar is Christ.

How could both of them have set it up as Laban claims? Christ came from God, but He also came from man. The pillar, Christ, was set up by both. He is the God/Man.

Jacob's brethren "gathered stones" into a heap. The heap is the Bible. Jacob's brethren picture those 40 or so men who received and wrote the Bible. The heap was formed into a circle. The structure of the Bible makes a clear pattern which forms concentric circles and it is based on the Hebrew aleph-bet.

It has a symmetry which is astonishingly beautiful and amazingly precise. It shows intention, precision, and beauty - all represented by the *gal*, heap, and the *ed*, witness - the Galeed. The use of two languages - Hebrew and Aramaic, to name the heap indicates that this witness is meant for all people, Hebrew and gentile alike.

This is the reason why, for the first time in the Bible, a non-Hebrew word is used. This witness will stand as a testament to all people for all time. It is a witness between God and man of the pact of peace made between the once antagonistic parties.

It is Galeed - the heap of witness, but also Mizpah, the watchtower. It is the place where God watches for transgressions of the covenant and it is the place where man can watch for them as well. It proves man's obedience to God and God's faithfulness to man.

And what may have seemed difficult to understand was the prohibition against taking any other wives besides Laban's daughters. What is that speaking of? Again, we need to return to what they symbolize - Leah is the OT law and Rachel is NT grace.

They are the two testaments to God's dealings with man. God has given one word which includes these two testaments. Nothing else can be added to them, such as the book of mormon, the koran, the writings of Ellen G. White, who founded Seventh Day Adventists, or any other writing.

But the prohibition isn't just to add wives, it is also to not harm the two wives Jacob has. This is the standard. Any violation of this will be witnessed by God and acted on. And this is noted again and again in the Bible itself - never add to or take from the words of this book. As it says, "God is witness between you and me."

When a violation of the agreement is made, God does witness. He tells us in His own word. We read this in John 5, when Jesus speaks of the Father -

"If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. 32 There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true. (v.31, 32)

This is why Laban was able to claim that he placed the heap and the pillar between them. Jesus came through man as did the Bible. They are both the work of God, but human agents were involved in the process of both. The Bible is a physical, tangible word. Not a spiritual concept without form.

Jesus is a physical, tangible man. It says in John, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

The word of God, the Bible, and the Word of God, Jesus, are how man sees, understands, and knows God. Laban said "I will not pass beyond this heap to you." The symbolism is that the Bible is the point which we will not exceed to come to God. In other words, it is our point of knowing Him and nothing else. The Bible tells us of Jesus and Jesus reveals God.

Then he said, "and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm." Jesus and the Bible are the standard by which we will be judged. Nothing is added to them by God and they are all-sufficient for His dealings with us.

The peace is found in these two. They are where restoration and harmony between God and man are realized. Next Laban invokes the God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father to be the judge. When Jacob swears though, he does it by "the Fear of Isaac."

He did this to confirm that the God Laban was speaking of is the same God, the only God, and the Living God who is to be feared. Even if man misunderstands God, God is God. When we misunderstand Him, it doesn't change who He is.

We discovered in this chapter that all of this has occurred in Gilead. Gilead means the Perpetual Fountain. The fountain is noted in the psalms, Jeremiah, and elsewhere as God. He is the Source and the giver of life. In Psalm 36 it says -

For with You *is* the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light. (9)

God's throne is the Perpetual Fountain symbolized by where the men are meeting, Gilead. And there on the mountain it says that "Jacob offered a sacrifice and called his brethren to eat bread." This is the first time this type of sacrifice is noted in the Bible. It is called *zebakh*. What occurs here is reflected in the 50th Psalm -

"Gather My saints together to Me,
Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice." (V.5)

The sacrifice symbolizes Christ's cross which restores us to God. The bread is His body, it is the Lord's supper which we take to commune together with God. Finally, after the meal it says that in the morning Laban arose, kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them and departed, returning home.

Laban, instead of cursing as he intended to when he came to Jacob, blessed the family. As the promise says, those who bless you, I will bless. Laban, a fallen man, a troubled man, a confused man, blessed and did not curse, and he returned to his place.

Man's dwelling is in the earth and while we walk on this round ball, we too have a choice. Will we accept the terms of the covenant, accept the sacrifice, and eat of the meal? Will we live in harmony with the Lord in the presence of His witnessed heap, His word, and His pillar which is His son?

The choice is ours to make. It seems that Laban chose wisely and I hope you will as well. This is the last time that Laban is referred to directly in the Bible. He will be mentioned only two more times, both in Genesis 46 and only in reference to the children of Israel born to Bilhah and Zilpah, not as an individual.

To me, he is one of the most curious people we've come across so far. I couldn't get my thoughts about him straight until this last chapter where he is mentioned. In the end, he is a picture of all of us - a fallen son of Adam who needs to get his thoughts about God straight and to get his conduct towards the Lord corrected.

He and his role in these past many sermons have been an enigma to me and he has cost me more sleepless time and more searching than anyone I have yet encountered. And I finally know the reason. He is the person searching the world for that which won't satisfy and who so desperately needs an encounter with the true God.

There on the hill known as the Perpetual Fountain, it appears that Laban made peace with God and accepted both the witness and the watchtower - the word and the Son.

Closing Verse: The words of the LORD *are* pure words, *Like* silver tried in a furnace of earth, Purified seven times. ⁷ You shall keep them, O LORD, You shall preserve them from this generation forever. Psalm 12:6, 7

Next Week: Genesis 32:1-8 (This is God's Camp) (78th Genesis Sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you and He has a good plan and purpose for you. Call on Him and let Him do marvelous things for you and through you.

The Witness and the Watchtower

And Laban answered and to Jacob he said,
These daughters are my daughters
These children are my children, this he pled
And this flock is my flock you tended by the waters

All that you see is mine
But what can I do this day to these
My daughters or to their children so fine
Whom they have borne, tell me please
Now therefore come let us make a covenant, you and I
And let it be a witness between us, yes let us try

So Jacob took a stone and as a pillar he set it up
Then Jacob said "Gather stones" to each brother
And they took stones and made a heap where they could sup
And they ate there on the heap with one another

Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed
Laban said "This heap is a witness between you and me indeed."

Therefore its name was called Galeed
Also Mizpah because he said to Jacob his brother
May the Lord watch between us, take heed
When we are absent from one another

If you afflict my daughters I decree
Or if you take other wives besides my daughters too
Although no man is with us, see
God is witness between me and you

Then Laban said to Jacob, "Here is this heap, you see
And here is this pillar with it also
Which I have placed between you and me
This heap is a witness and this pillar is a witness, you know

That I will not pass beyond this heap to you, not even with my arm
And you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar for harm

The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor too
And the God of their father judge between me and you

And Jacob swore by the Fear of Isaac His father
Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain
And called his brethren to eat bread with one another
And they ate bread and stayed all night at the Perpetual Fountain

And early in the morning Laban arose to go
And kissed his sons and daughters goodbye
And blessed them, then Laban departed, you know
And returned to his place maybe with a tear in his eye

The symbolism we see in this short story
Tells us of God, His word, His Son, His glory

And that we are to hold fast to the word
Not adding to it nor harming it in any way
Because it is our witness from the Lord
And so we should search it's mysteries each and every day

Christ is the pillar and the center of our faith
He is the One whom the Bible does proclaim
And God in His word about Jesus it does saith

And so let us forever and ever exalt His glorious name

Oh beautiful and majestic awesome Lord
Thank You for Your wondrous, precious word

Let us cherish it and never depart from what it does say
Until the time when You return for us some glorious day

Hallelujah and Amen...