

## **Jacob Called To Return**

Reading: Genesis 31:1-42, Romans 8

H/N 7/03/04pm

Study: Genesis 31:1-21

Psalms: 12, 37:3-8, 37:28-34, 124:5-8

Jacob's first attempt to return to his own place was not successful. He decided himself and sought to go in his own strength. But he fell victim to the deceiver and con man Laban. Jacob thought his plan to collect all the off-colour animals was watertight, but nothing was watertight around a man like Laban. Nevertheless God blessed Jacob and his flocks increased and he became prosperous – but it was indeed only because of the Lord as we learn today. And the Lord then called upon Jacob to *return to the land of your fathers and to your family and I will be with you* (31:3).

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and He will direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes* (Proverbs 3). A friend from India wrote this week how through these words the Lord directed her in her business. When we were there we saw her working hard preparing to open a café – the Café of Joy. She was a new believer. But the man downstairs would not let her rebuild the broken down steps that led to her café. One day he abused her. She got an influential friend to go and 'speak' to the man and they planned to send some thugs around to beat him up – the not unusual way in India. But the Lord spoke to her through this text – many prayed, and the news I got just this week was that the man withdrew his opposition and allowed the steps to be fixed.

### **Laban Cheats**

Laban was not a pleasant fellow. Having agreed to the plan Jacob proposed he not only shipped off all the off-colour types to his sons, but then kept changing what they agreed to. He kept finding loopholes. *Ten times he changed my wages* Jacob said. As Jacobs flocks increased you can just hear him saying 'I didn't mean 'all' the off-colour ones just the speckled ones. And then when the speckled ones began to increase he would have said 'no it was not the speckled ones but the spotted ones'. The agreement meant nothing to him. He kept finding ways around it.

We are reminded of Satan himself who came to Eve saying 'did God really say you shall not eat of every tree in the garden'. God had made it clear to Adam and Eve what he required and they understood. But the work of the evil one was to question the command of God, the agreement that God made. 'You can't eat from every tree?' said Satan. 'Oh it is just one tree we can't eat from' said Eve, revealing the reason why to the enemy. And then the enemy mocked and so came the tragedy of the Fall.

It is a tragedy in the lives of too many people today, people who cleverly find some loophole, as they think, in Gods law. This is the nature of the flesh, of the sinful heart – its greatest desire is to find away around the command. We see it in children do we not – 'is there any way that I can get out of doing this thing I was asked to do'. And it is still the same in adults.

You shall not murder says the command. But that does not mean the unborn they say. That does not mean you cannot kill an old person or invalid whose life is not worth living. Clever arguments are put forward in these efforts to find loopholes in the law of God. And it is the same with homosexuality. Under Gods law it is a sin, but the clever try to find loopholes – it can't really mean that they say?

For the evil man Laban nothing was ever black and white. But as surely as Jacob said the pure colours are yours and the off-colours will be mine, so clear are the laws of God. *So my righteousness will answer for me in time to come* said Jacob (30:33). Remember Gods righteous law stands firm and those who violate it, clever as they may be, they will find themselves answering to the Lawgiver, the judge of all men, in the near future.

God's law says you shall not make yourself a carved image. But what do we see? We see images in churches and hear men defending them saying 'Oh they are not really idols; they just help some people to worship'. And worship itself. God has told us how to worship him. The Reformers sought to worship God according to his word and so we have the regulative principle in our confession 'the acceptable way of worshipping God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under an visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in holy Scripture (WCF

xxi).

Let us then not be like Laban always seeking to find loopholes in the law – neither the law of the land, nor the law of God. Let us give thanks for the law and seek to obey it with the strength God gives to us.

## Jacob Leaves

### Called

After a few years of being cheated by Laban the Lord spoke to Jacob in dream (v 3) – the full details he tells to his wives later. The Angel of God told Jacob how God had been overruling and frustrating the wicked plans of Laban. God had been working *all things together for good to those who love him and have been called according to his purpose* (Romans 8:28). It was the God of Bethel who spoke to him, reminding him of the vow he took at Bethel some 20 years before.

God had faithfully watched over Jacob all these years in Haran. He had wives and was very prosperous. God called upon him to return to the land of his fathers and again promised *I will be with you*. Unlike his previous attempt to leave, Jacob now had a word from the Lord. As one writer has said 'He was now called as well as driven'. The driven factor had intensified with Laban's changed attitude. But now was the right time to return because it was the Lord's time.

Jacob must have been overjoyed to hear the Lord calling him again. He was beginning to feel hostility from Laban and jealousy from his sons. The Lord in his mercy called Jacob to leave. What a blessing it is to know the call of the Lord in one's life – the call to a job, a ministry, a relationship or whatever. Have you known such blessing? Changes are rarely easy, but to know that it is the will of the Lord brings peace and confidence to your heart.

Jacob left amidst great opposition. He was pursued and threatened as we find out later. This word from the Lord – *I will be with you* – must have sustained him in times of distress. His call to return to Canaan would be repeated many years later with the great exodus out of Egypt. Do you see the parallels? Pharaoh, like Laban, sought to prevent the people of God from leaving, always going back on what he promised. They stole away in the middle of the night as they headed towards the Promised Land.

### Stole Away

Yes – Jacob *stole away unknown to Laban the Syrian*. We noted previously Jacob's desire to leave on good terms – to leave peaceably. That attempt was not successful. It was frustrated by Laban's hollow plea to stay and *name your wages*. Now the Lord called him to leave – but why this secrecy, this stealing away. We see later (32:27) how Laban got angry and said he would have given him a proper send off.

But from bitter experience Jacob knew that Laban would never have sent him off in peace. He had done what he could to live at peace with Laban. The Scripture (Romans 12) says *if it possible, as far as it depends on you live at peace with all men*. It was not possible to live at peace with the wicked Laban.

### Communicates

It is great to see the communication between Jacob and his wives in this scene before us. What a contrast to the previous chapter. After God spoke to him Jacob called both his wives to share with them the word from God. He had a secret meeting with them in the field. Rachel is named first but he confides in them both. It is a very delicate situation because he has to share about their father who was cheating him. The he tells them about the dream and how *God had taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me*. Now God had called him to leave, to return to the land of his family.

How would Rachel and Leah react? Would marriage ties be stronger than parental ties? Would they keep the confidence that Jacob had placed in them or would they betray him to their father?

It is with relief and joy that we read they agreed with Jacob saying *whatever God has said to you do it*. It is not always like this despite the clear teaching of the Bible that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. In India with arranged marriages and the wife coming to the husband's parental home to live, it can happen that the husband sides with his mother against his wife. And it happens in our own society sometimes. But the marriage

bond must be stronger than any other.

Rachel and Leah had not been well treated by their father. He had spent up what should have been their dowry. They agreed with Jacob and so we see wonderful harmony in Jacob's family at last, as they set out as one household for the Promised Land. They would need to stand together as they faced opposition and trouble along the way.

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