

GENESIS 31:1-13 (RETURN TO THE LAND OF YOUR FATHERS)

Introduction: Jacob left Canaan and spent 20 years in Mesopotamia. Before he left, the Lord promised to be with him and keep him wherever he went. Some sermons ago, we saw that his time out of the land of promise pictures Israel's times of exile from their homeland.

God, who cannot lie, promised that He would return them to their land. In fact, in Leviticus chapter 26, it's hinted that there would be not one, but two exiles of the people. Isaiah picked up on that and promised that they would be returned a second time, stating this before they had been exiled even once.

Jeremiah gives us information concerning the duration of the first exile - 70 years. Then Ezekiel gives more information to allow us to know the exact amount of time of the second exile.

The surety of God's word is realized in the kept promises found there. And because of these promises, which all the world has seen fulfilled, time and time again, we can be all the more sure in the promises which are still future to us now.

This is why prophecy is such an important tool in the Bible and why it is such an important tool in history as well. It affirms the belief of the believer and it is a witness against the unbeliever. The world today, even among Christians, is filled with disbelief at the promises made to Israel.

For the saved Christian, their rewards and losses will be partially based on their treatment of this group of people. For the unsaved, the very condemnation they deserve will be highlighted by their rejection of His hand upon them.

Text Verse: And I will cause the captives of Judah and the captives of Israel to return, and will rebuild those places as at the first. 8 I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned and by which they have transgressed against Me. Jeremiah 33:7, 8

Let us endeavor to accept God's word and accept that regardless of whether they deserve it or not, Israel is back in their land by God's direction and they will remain planted there because of His promises to them. And so... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. Jealous of Prosperity

Now *Jacob* heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has acquired all this wealth."

This is now approximately the year 2265AM. Interestingly, this chapter begins with jealousy outside Jacob's immediate family towards him. The last chapter began with jealousy within the family and directed toward Leah -

Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die!"

This is no mistake and it's showing us the contrast between the two chapters. Jealousy is actually used both times to bring about God's purposes. The first time, to build up Israel's family, and the second time it will precipitate them leaving for Canaan.

Laban's sons accuse Jacob here of taking away all of their father's wealth, but this is untrue. Laban actually still had sheep, it's just that what Jacob has is now so much more than what Laban has.

They are green with envy and accusing him of stealing everything.

We know Laban still has flocks because the original flock was divided 6 years earlier. His sons took the abnormal colored ones and Jacob took the normal colored ones. Laban had plenty of sheep from both flocks as we'll see later in verse 19.

If Jacob has prospered, it in no way diminishes what they should have earned during the same period. If they had simply been attentive to their

flocks and diligent in their work like Jacob was, they would have increased in wealth as well.

But Jacob worked hard and was blessed, which of course brought about their envy. Jealousy is a green-eyed monster and they are jealous. The Geneva Bible says about this verse, "The covetous think that whatever they cannot take, is taken from them."

The term Laban's sons use for wealth is the word kavod. It is a word which indicates heaviness. Jacob has become heavy with wealth. But along with the wealth comes something else the Bible warns about - cares and anxieties. Ecclesiastes 5 says this -

"He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also *is* vanity. ¹¹ When goods increase, They increase who eat them; So what profit have the owners Except to see *them* with their eyes? ¹² The sleep of a laboring man *is* sweet, Whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep."

This is proven true around the world. When people are poor but have enough to sustain them, they are generally content with life. But as wealth increases, we worry about our things. We put locks on doors and alarms on our cars.

We worry about dust on the shelves and whether or not the pillows on the couch are properly aligned. If our neighbor buys a new TV, we buy a bigger one. We worry over the things we have to the point that we lose sleep thinking about them.

Solomon wrote those words about 3000 years ago and they ring all the more truly in the world today. As wealth for the masses has increased, worry over our stuff has led to a world full of neurotic people who rely on pills to take away their worries.

² And Jacob saw the countenance of Laban, and indeed it *was not favorable* toward him as before.

Not only are Laban's sons jealous, but Laban is too. Six years earlier, it was he who had accepted the terms of the agreement which Jacob proposed. And he didn't only accept them, he jumped at them. They were the delight of his heart when he heard them.

They were an offer too good to be true, but now that things had turned against him, he was sullen. And so the Bible says his attitude wasn't toward Jacob as before. Jacob was industrious, crafty, and blessed by God in his work and it has paid off for him, but it has resulted in trouble between him and Laban. Ecclesiastes 4:4 perfectly describes the matter -

"Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor. This also *is* vanity and grasping for the wind."

Envy is such a powerful force that it often leads to murder. The most famous case of envy leading to murder in human history occurred in Jerusalem against a descendant of Jacob. We read about it in Matthew 27.

Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished. ¹⁶ And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. ¹⁷ Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" ¹⁸ For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.

It was so obvious even to Pilate what was going on, that he offered the people an alternative to the decision of the leaders. Their envy had caused them to condemn an innocent man. Who would have ever imagined that their condemnation led to the only thing that could ever lead to their salvation.

The amazing work of God is never more evident than in the life of His Son, including the envy that those He walked among used against Him.

³ Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you."

This is the first time that the term Lord, or Jehovah, has been mentioned since two sermons ago. During the last sermon, which pictured the growth of the church, the term "Lord" wasn't mentioned at all.

Now He reenters the narrative to speak to Jacob. "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you." The Lord knows the right time for all things, including the movement of His covenant people for His covenant purposes.

This passage then is certainly a picture of the return of Israel to their homeland. We can back up now to verse 1 and see that the jealousy of Laban's sons is a picture of the jealousy of the world at the prosperity of the Jewish people.

The exact same terminology that they used is used time and time again by people of the world. We hear it all the time even now - "The Jews have taken away all that is ours and from it they have acquired all their wealth."

The world goes from the attitude of Laban's sons to the next attitude, that of Laban. Their countenance changes towards the Jewish people *because* of jealousy and they no longer turn their faces towards them. And what is the result?

Seizing what they have earned, growing hostility towards them, and eventually either exiling them or killing them. It is the theme of the book of Esther during the first dispersion and it has been seen again and again and again in the past 2000 years, culminating in the Holocaust and the Russian pogroms. As Proverbs says -

Wrath *is* cruel and anger a torrent,
But who *is* able to stand before jealousy? Proverbs 27:4

Despite the conflict and despite the situation, the Lord's words to Jacob are reflected twice to the people of Israel, after both the Babylonian and then the Roman exiles - "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you."

Before we move on, I want to ask, do they deserve being returned to the land? Do the people Israel merit what God has given them? No. I was watching an episode of House recently and one of the characters was a Jewish guy who was in the porn business.

This isn't uncommon, nor is it uncommon that many Jews are entirely secular or who follow any of countless religions - Buddhism, Hinduism, or whatever. I know Jews that have carved idols in their homes that they think somehow bless.

I could go on, but is this deserving of God's favor? The answer is "No." So why has God reestablished them as a nation once again? The answer is found in Ezekiel 36 -

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “I do not do *this* for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name’s sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. ²³ And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I *am* the LORD,” says the Lord GOD, “when I am hallowed in you before their eyes.”

The reason this has happened is because they bear His name; they are His people and He will be glorified through them, whether they acknowledge it now or not. In fact, He says they have profaned His name among the nations, something they continue to do to this day. But God is faithful to His unfaithful people.

The time has come. The description of the land found two chapters later in Ezekiel could only be speaking of modern times. The prophecies have never been fulfilled in the past and anyone who can't see this is either deluded or an anti-Semite, or both. Just as Jacob was returned, so is Israel today. And time marches on...

After many days you will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword *and* gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they

were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely. Ezekiel 38:8

II. Unfair Treatment

⁴So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field, to his flock,

Make a mental note that Rachel is placed first in this verse. Even though she is the second wife, she is the beloved of Jacob and also the one who pictures grace rather than the law. Rather than going back to the camp, he called the two of them to the field. His flight is going to be in secret and so secrecy will be maintained.

Plus, by staying away from the camp, he would avoid meeting up with Laban's family which, by this time, could actually turn bad. The Lord has directed him to move and he will do so carefully.

⁵and said to them, "I see your father's countenance, that it is not favorable toward me as before; but the God of my father has been with me.

Here in the fields and among his flocks he notes that their father isn't looking favorably at him any more. He is worried about what will occur between them and what has already come between them - which we'll read about in a minute.

Despite what has happened though, he says that the God of his father has been with him. The same God who lead Abraham and Isaac isn't limited by boundaries. Jacob might not be in the land of promise, but he is still under the covenant care.

This is no less true with Israel during their exiles. They may have been outside of the covenant graces, but not outside of the covenant care. Exile to them occurs because of disobedience, but even in exile, God has tended to them and cared for them.

⁶And you know that with all my might I have served your father.

Jacob didn't just serve Laban for the past six years, but for twenty full years now. The first seven years were for Rachel and that should have been the end of the matter, but then Laban deceived him and it meant another seven years of work.

If he was a crummy worker, Laban would have just given him Rachel and that would have been it. But he worked so well that Laban got seven more years of work from him. If he had slacked off during the second seven years, he never would have hired him after the agreement was up. But he did.

When he did, he said that the Lord had blessed him because of Jacob's work. The last six years were no different, except that the blessings went to Jacob and not Laban. And once again we see the same pattern in the Jewish people among the nations.

They move in and bring prosperity to those around them. Eventually the area benefits from their work too and their efforts promote the society's welfare. There is nothing wrong with this.

But eventually they, like any hard working citizen in America today, get penalized for their labors. What is earned through industry is envied and taken by the lazy and wicked.

⁷Yet your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me.

Time and time again in the Bible, the term "ten times" or the number 10 is used as an idiom meaning "numerous." It indicates a fullness of times. In the case of Laban, whenever Jacob's flock began to grow, Laban would change the rules of his wages.

This verse here shows the gracious nature of Jacob because he could have stood on and demanded the original agreement. However, he allowed Laban to roll right over him. This is the same thing that has happened time and time again to the Jewish people as well as to conservative, hard working Christians.

In America, our wages are changed anytime the government needs more money. They simply break whatever promise they made and raise taxes or pass another fee. The ones who suffer the most are those who work the hardest and are the most diligent. Again, we can turn to Ecclesiastes 5:8 to see this truth -

If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter; for high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them.

With every new level of authority over a person comes another level of oppression and perversion of justice. Jacob had only one level above him and yet he felt the injustice of it.

Laban's attitude towards Jacob is a picture of what has happened throughout history - the mistreating of God's hardworking people out of jealousy and an inability to demonstrate self industry.

However, when a person knows where their blessings come from, they know that whatever another does to harm them is temporary.

Jacob the deceiver of his father is deceived by his own father in law and yet God protected him in the process. His faithfulness has testified to his state before the Lord and he has prospered.

⁸ If he said thus: 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore speckled. And if he said thus: 'The streaked shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore streaked.

This shows the direct providence of God over the flocks of Jacob. We have to go back to the previous chapter to see what the original terms were. There it said, "...every one that *is* not speckled and spotted among the goats, and brown among the lambs, will be considered stolen, if *it is* with me."

The original agreement was that **all** of the abnormally colored flocks would be Jacob's. However, it quickly became apparent that the majority of the

new births were abnormally colored. So Laban changed it to only a portion of them - such as the speckled.

The next season, only speckled would be born and so Laban would say, "Ok the speckled will be mine and the spotted will be yours." The next season, they would come out all spotted. This then shows that there was more than just genetic engineering on Jacob's part.

What is happening here goes back to a thought in the previous sermon which I have to explain now. The flocks of Jacob are a picture of the people of the church, selected by God and who are marked in a unique way to identify them.

I said then that the external markings of the animals cannot be equated with circumcision in the flesh. Laban continuously changed the terms and so the markings must be pointing to a different type of marking - the sealing of the Holy Spirit.

This is an internal identifier and not mere circumcision, which is only an outward sign. This is important to understand, because the flocks Jacob obtained were pointing to the true people of God - both Jew and gentile - who are selected by God as His people. We'll see this more clearly in a few verses.

No matter though, the colors always came out to Jacob's advantage and thus it had to be by God's providence. Laban was too blinded to see this. We as humans are likewise too blinded to see God's blessings on His people - be it Christians or Jews. The world envies without thinking.

One point to be made is that Jacob never tells his wives about his own methods for increasing the number of odd-colored flock. But this doesn't imply he was hiding anything. What is true and you can go look in the mirror to see it, divine help in no way excludes self help. In fact, they compliment each other.

When we sit around waiting for God's miracles, we very well may be wasting the very miracles He is waiting to give. The blind man on the

roadside who wanted Jesus to heal him didn't just sit there and hope He would come over and do it. Instead he acted -

⁴⁶ Now they came to Jericho. As He went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the road begging. ⁴⁷ And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁸ Then many warned him to be quiet; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁹ So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. Then they called the blind man, saying to him, "Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you." ⁵⁰ And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ So Jesus answered and said to him, "What do you want Me to do for you?" The blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, that I may receive my sight." ⁵² Then Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road. Mark 10

If you want it, He may provide it "through you to you" and not "to you" alone. Don't sit idly by and expect God to do all the work.

⁹ So God has taken away the livestock of your father and given *them* to me.

Whether it was by personal efforts which were blessed by God, or by God's blessing apart from his efforts, Jacob has let us know that the transfer of the wealth is ultimately by the hand of God. Laban has only himself to blame and Jacob has only God to credit.

Jacob is telling his wives this so that they understand the situation he is facing and what the result of it ultimately must be.

III. The God of Bethel

¹⁰ "And it happened, at the time when the flocks conceived, that I lifted my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the rams which leaped upon the flocks *were* streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted.

This verse and the next two are extremely complicated to understand and there are clues in the Hebrew which only confuse scholars more. It appears there are two separate visions, one in verse 10 and one in verse 11 & 12.

The first is thought to be at the beginning of his six years of labor, although some think that it came afterwards. If it was at the beginning, then it was to teach him in advance that no matter what course of action he took, God would bring about his prosperity.

If it is at the end of the six years, it was to show what God had done for him during his years of labor. Either way, the result comes out the same, but it would have made a difference to Jacob. And it makes a difference to us to know the outcome too.

In other words, we can look at this as a lesson directly related to the Bible. God has given us His word in its pages, just like Jacob had a vision. We can look at the word and know the final outcome of what **will** happen and be assured of it; with absolute confidence.

Or we can look at the word and see what it says God **has done** for us and we can see how He has accomplished everything so far, and also what we need for our future lives.

So the thought we can make here concerning the Lord's word to Jacob is either, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." Or, "I have built my church and the gates of hell could not prevail against it."

Either way, the outcome will be the same. How we perceive the words of the Bible is the most important decision we can make. If it is truth, then what it tells us *has been* is true, and what it tells us *will be* is therefore true. We are somewhere along the path of the words it proclaims and moving towards their fulfillment.

One thing to tell you here is that all of a sudden, a new word to describe the colors of the flock comes out in this verse, translated here as "gray-spotted." This is the Hebrew word *berudim*.

This color has never been mentioned before. It comes from the word barod. The spots are white like hailstones. The other goats were white with black, but these are black with white.

They are completely new and their introduction is probably to show that no matter what Laban asked for, God introduced something new to show the truth of his blessing to Jacob. In other words, God is in complete control.

¹¹ Then the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, 'Jacob.' And I said, 'Here I am.'

This is either Jacob's second dream, or the internal response to the first. Jacob has a vision where he sees what happened with the flocks. After this, be it six seconds or six years, the Angel of God speaks to him and he answers.

This "Angel of God" is the Lord who spoke to him at Bethel. Therefore it is God; it is Jesus. All are one in this picture and He will identify Himself this way in just a minute. He now confirms the dream that Jacob relayed to his wives just a verse ago.

¹² And He said, 'Lift your eyes now and see, all the rams which leap on the flocks *are* streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you.

And sure enough, just as Jacob's dream showed the mating rams' colors, the Lord confirmed his dream. The Lord knew that Laban had cheated him and would continue to cheat him, and so He directed the flocks according to His wisdom as the Creator.

Everything that's happened has been at the Lord's direction. It is meant as an encouragement to him so that he will commit himself to what he will next be directed to do - return home to the land where his brother is and who once intended on killing him.

God has been watching and God will continue to watch over him.

¹³ I *am* the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar *and* where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family.”

The reassuring words echo back 20 years. Jacob was 77 when he left Canaan. He traveled through Bethel and had a vision where the Lord told him, "Behold, I *am* with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

And true to His promise, He has been with him, kept him, and is now directing him back to the land of his birth. The Lord reminds him of the pillar and the vow as well. In essence, He's saying "I am fulfilling my words to you, now you will fulfill your vow to me."

Jacob's time of exile is ending and Israel's time of exile has ended. God, who is ever-faithful, attends to His people, His family, and His flock.

This is the end of today's verses and it asks us to think on the things we may have vowed when we were in dire straits. We ask the Lord for help and make promises in the process. When He helps, we need to remember our promises.

Did we promise to give up sex, drugs, gambling, or booze? Then keep the vow. Did we promise to go to church every week for the rest of our lives? It may be painful, but keep the vow. The Bible asks us to pay our vows, whatever they are and we are reminded of that here.

Maybe you've never encountered the saving grace of the Lord before. You can do that without a vow. He simply wants you and He wants to be Your Lord.

Closing Verse: For behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord, 'that I will bring back from captivity My people Israel and Judah,' says the Lord. 'And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.'" Jeremiah 30:3

Next Week: Genesis 31:14-30 (Jacob's Flight) (75th 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.

Return to the Land of Your Fathers

Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying
Jacob has taken away all that was our father's
And from what was our father's, his bills he is paying
He has acquired all this wealth, and us it bothers
And Jacob saw the countenance of Laban, it was truly sore
And indeed it was not favorable toward him as before

Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to your fathers' land
And to your family, and I will be with you - at your right hand
So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah at once
To the field and to his flock to tell the score
And said to them, "I see your father's countenance
That it is not favorable toward me as before

But the God of my father has been with me
And you know that with all my might I have served him faithfully
Yet your father has acted deceptively
And changed my wages ten times
But God did not allow him to hurt me
Let me tell you about his crimes
If he said, "The speckled shall your wages be
Then all the flocks bore speckled as he could clearly see
And if he said, "The streaked shall be your wages
Then all the flocks bore streaked, causing him rages
So God has taken away the livestock of your father
And given them to me, to me and not another

And it happened at the time when the flocks conceived
That I lifted my eyes and saw in a dream that I gotted

And the rams which leaped upon the flocks I perceived
Were streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted
Then the Angel of God in a dream spoke to me
Saying "Jacob" and I said "Here I am."
And He said, "Lift your eyes now and see
Direct your eyes toward each ram
All the rams which leap on the flocks you pass through
Are streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted
For I have seen all that Laban is doing to you
And the ill treatment that he has plotted
I am the God of Bethel where you anointed
The pillar and where you made a vow to me
Now arise, get out of this land as I have appointed
And return to the land of your family

This is Jacob's life's story
The genesis of the people Israel
The people through whom would come the Glory
And it is a marvelous story to tell
Through this family will come our majestic King
The Savior of the world and our glorious Lord
It is to our beloved Jesus we sing
He, God incarnate, the Eternal Word

Thank You O God for this beautiful story
Of the coming of Christ and His majestic glory

Hallelujah and Amen...