

Scripture Reading: Genesis 30

“2 And Jacob saw the countenance of Laban, and indeed it was not favorable toward him as before. 3 Then Jehovah said to Jacob, ‘Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you.’ 4 So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field, to his flock, 5 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. 6 And you know that with all my might I have served your father. 7 Yet your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me. 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. 9 So God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me. 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. 11 Then the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, ‘Jacob.’ And I said, ‘Here I am.’ 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. 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 Stolen Idols’

As I pointed out last week we have come to a major turning point in our story with God calling Jacob back to the Land of Promise and reminding Jacob how he met with God at Bethel.

- We will see him come again to that important spot but his return is filled with intrigue with both his leaving and his coming!

Here he encounters his uncle Laban and soon it will be his brother Esau. When we step back just a bit and look at this story, we see the preparation for the journey, some struggles along the way and thankfulness and worship at its conclusion.

- How often we see this pattern in our lives as we walk with the Lord!
- And I hope we will see today how our individual journeys are all a part of the great journey that the Holy Spirit is guiding the Bride of Jesus through in all of history!

So in what I read we are reminded that Laban is now concerned, as were his sons, that the prosperity which God had been pouring down on all of them in the time that Jacob served him was now benefiting Jacob as well and of course they see this as somehow stealing from their inheritance.

- Also we saw as I pointed out last week, that Jacob certainly understood how all of the credit for this prosperity belonged to God with all the events that took place.

Jacob has called his wives to the place where he was keeping his sheep;

I think in large part to make sure that the influence of the brothers had not impacted their sisters in the same way.

- It turns out, as we shall see, that they knew their father pretty well and they were more than willing to leave with Jacob.

We should remember that we have at least three locations referenced in this account so as to not become confused. You had the dwelling place for the household with the wives & children and you had the place where the flocks were kept which were not the same and thus Jacob called his wives to him as he was shepherding the sheep.

We should also remember that Laban was keeping another flock of sheep at least a three-day journey away so they would not be confused with Jacob's sheep and goats out of fear that Jacob would take what was not his. In verse 13, we see that it is God who is clearly in charge of the journey:

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."

Now we should note that from a human standpoint, Jacob's family owned NO part of Canaan at this point other than a burial plot!

- But God calls it the land of your family and not without great cause!

Yes, God can look down through hundreds of years of human history & see where the Land of Canaan was conquered and became the possession of the Tribes descended from Jacob's many sons.

But God also knows that it is being given to them, not because of their faithfulness or special status, but rather because it is the Land of Promise where the Promised Seed of the women would be born...

- AND also sacrificed there as the Lamb of God saving His people from their sins, thus crushing the head of the Serpent.

So Jacob gives his account and finds nothing but support from his wives:

14 "Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? 15 Are we not considered strangers by him?

For he has sold us, and also completely consumed our money. 16 For all these riches which God has taken from our father are really ours and our children's; now then, whatever God has said to you, do it."

- Obviously they were not pleased with Dad's arrangements for them!
- Since God has told Jacob to return to the Land of Promise, they think this is a great idea!

17 "Then Jacob rose and set his sons and his wives on camels. 18 And he carried away all his livestock and all his possessions which he had gained, his acquired livestock which he had gained in Padan Aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan."

- Jacob came empty handed and now returns with many children and vast riches!
- But he takes only what is rightfully his.

But then we are given the rest of the story: **19 "Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel had stolen the household idols that were her father's."**

OK, so it is no surprise that Laban could have been away, especially if he was shearing the sheep that were three days away as it would appear.

- However, being told the Rachel stole some of the family idols is a bit more of a shocker!

We are not told just what her motive was in doing so, but it would be an action that was displeasing to BOTH her father and her husband, and of course to God Himself.

And then it is confirmed that Laban is unaware of the plan...

20 "And Jacob stole away, unknown to Laban the Syrian, in that he did not tell him that he intended to flee." 21 So [Jacob] fled with all that he had. He arose and crossed the river, and headed toward the mountains of Gilead." 22 And Laban was told on the third day that Jacob had fled."

Here we can assume that one of his servants or confidants made the three-day journey to bear the bad news.

23 “Then he took his brethren with him and pursued him for seven days’ journey, and he overtook him in the mountains of Gilead.”

With at least a three-day head start it took some time for Laban to catch up even though he could travel faster than Jacob could have with all his wives & children & livestock!

- **Laban comes looking to extract his vengeance, but God had promised to protect Jacob and that is just what He does...**

24 “But God had come to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said to him, “Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.”

As we see the rest of this story unfold we can certainly have a powerful example of the truth given to us at

Proverbs 16:7 “When a man’s ways please Jehovah, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.”

25 “So Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mountains, & Laban with his brethren pitched in the mountains of Gilead.”

- **The camps are settled in and I am pretty sure Jacob was a bit nervous about the upcoming meeting!**

26 “And Laban said to Jacob: “What have you done, that you have stolen away unknown to me, and carried away my daughters like captives taken with the sword? 27 Why did you flee away secretly, and steal away from me, and not tell me; for I might have sent you away with joy and songs, with timbrel and harp? 28 And you did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters. Now you have done foolishly in so doing.”

Now of course having seen the character of Laban over the past twenty years, Jacob probably took most of this with a grain of salt...

- **But then we see Laban being a bit more honest in his purposes!**

29 “It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, ‘Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.’”

Here we have Laban acknowledging Jacob’s God and His power...

- **And we will see next week that Laban again acknowledges the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob!**

And this is interesting because that is NOT where his loyalty lies...

30 “And now you have surely gone because you greatly long for your father’s house, but why did you steal my gods?”

Jacob will answer both charges, but it is interesting to note that while God could easily have turned Laban back on that prior night...

- **He instead has him complete the journey with a warning to cause no harm and now as Chrysostom said long ago, we have the enemy of God as a proclaimer of God’s truth!**

In verse 31 we have the first part of Jacob’s answer: “Then Jacob answered and said to Laban, “Because I was afraid, for I said, ‘Perhaps you would take your daughters from me by force.’”

- **Jacob is honest with Laban about why he left secretly!**

He is also very honest in the second part of his answer in verse 32:

“With whomever you find your gods, do not let him live. In the presence of our brethren, identify what I have of yours and take it with you.” For Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them.”

- **It might have been wiser for Jacob to have first investigated the situation on his own before making such a strong judgment, but idolatry was a serious offense.**

- I don't think Jacob could have imagined anyone close to him, no less the wife whom he truly loved, to have done such a thing so he clearly sees this as a false charge!

33 "And Laban went into Jacob's tent, into Leah's tent, and into the two maids' tents, but he did not find them. Then he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's tent. 34 Now Rachel had taken the household idols, put them in the camel's saddle, and sat on them." [explain the saddle]

So Rachel stole these idols and now hides them from her father...

Some have tried to argue that Rachel took the idols in the first place to keep her father away from them, but if his well-being was what she had in mind she could easily have destroyed them as they crossed the mighty river in their journey and Jacob should have known. Whether she took these household gods to spite her father or because of her sincere attachment to them we are not told, but in either case it was not good. We will see the need to clear out idols from Jacob's family a bit later here in the Book of Beginnings and we know that idolatry would be a MAJOR problem for the entire history of the Nation of Israel up until the exile to Babylon many years later.

And of course it carries on down to our New Testament times with the Apostle John ending his first Epistle with a simple admonition: "Little children keep yourselves from idols."

This is something that we must not look back at Rachel thinking, 'Well now that was pretty stupid:...

- We would never do such a thing!

John's warning is not without good cause and any good student of Church history knows how true this is.

Idolatry can consume an entire group of Churches as it has Rome or Orthodoxy, but it can also take in individuals and families. [tell the family story in LA]

And just as the Greek and Roman cultures had gods for just about anything, we can do the same today with things that would not be considered "religious symbols or idols."

As we discussed last week, our possessions can certainly become an idol. Things we are obsessed with can be idols. Our spouses or other family members can become an idol if they take the place of or are in our minds or actions more important than God. If you want to fully understand how subtle our enemies can be in this area, I would commend C.S. Lewis' little book *The Screwtape Letters* for further study...

- And of course it should be required reading for all our young people!

And finally there is another important lesson we can learn from Laban at this point in our account about how blind people can be to a weakness they might have in this area. Remember Laban had an encounter with the living God just the night before and it had such an impact on him that he refuses to cause Jacob the harm he had intended.

- And yet at the same time, he is passionate about finding the false gods stolen from his home!

"And Laban searched all about the tent but did not find them. 35 And she said to her father, "Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise before you, for the manner of women is with me."

Rachel is very creative in the way she hides the idols and I am sure that Laban thought that even if Rachel was the culprit she would never have defiled those gods in this way!

- In any case we are told that Laban did not find the household idols, and this brings the expected response from Jacob.

36 "Then Jacob was angry and rebuked Laban, and Jacob answered and said to Laban: "What is my trespass? What is my sin, that you have so hotly pursued me? 37 Although you have searched all my things, what part of your household things have you found? Set it here before my brethren and your brethren, that they may judge between us both!"

- After giving an angry rebuke Jacob then goes on to make his defense:

38 “These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock. 39 That which was torn by beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. 40 There I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes. 41 Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. 42 Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed.

- God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked you last night.”

Jacob’s journey is not yet finished and in the coming weeks we will see God giving him peace with his enemies behind him here with Laban, and in front of him with his brother Esau. For this morning I want us to focus on this concept of journeys that I mentioned at the beginning. I often stress the importance of remembering that God knows where He is taking history and He will make sure that all the details in the end fit together for His glory and the good of His people who He chose as the glorious Bride for His Son.

- And of course each of us plays a part in that story!

And thus just as we asked last week whether we would like the character we were playing in God’s story we can also evaluate the journey that our character is currently taking.

- Did we make the proper preparations?’
- Are we traveling well: Making progress and handling adversities?
- And perhaps the most important question to ask is whether we are going to the right destination?

You can have a really fast car that has been properly serviced so it will not break down, BUT if you are on the wrong road it will not get you to your destination! At bottom this was Laban’s problem! Although he has been used by God to accomplish His purposes and even acknowledged this fact to Jacob, he is still focused on his idols rather than the living God.

Next week we will see that Laban wanted no part of the Promised Land.

- With Jacob we have a man, who though he was caught up in various sins, has not lost his focus on God and now rightly focuses on where he is supposed to be going.

Jacob met God at Bethel and now God has reminded him of this fact as He encourages him on in this journey. Many of us have such experiences that we can look back on as well: Like that walk which I mentioned taking last week where I lost a very important argument with the Living God.

Now Lord willing our covenant children never have to have the need for such a dramatic conversion experience like mine where there were many serious sins to repent of and turn from... BUT it is important to know that they will have encounters with God to remember. [account of our girls]

And of course we all have our baptisms as a good point of reference...

- This is why we often say that Christians can be called back to their baptisms if they are having doubts or fall into sin.

We do this not because we think folks are saved by what we do up here during a baptism, anymore that those piles of stones or all those sacrifices saved anyone in the Old Testament!

- But rather just as God made His saving covenant with Jacob real at Bethel it is a point of contact that we should never forget.

We have been given a new name and belong to God and that fact is what should cause us to constantly review our supplies and check our route on the journey that God has us making! Whatever idols or distractions we may have in our lives must be left behind as we seek to serve the living God!

As the writer of Hebrews said well after giving his long list of the faithful Saints in the Old Testament:

Hebrews 12:1

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Communion Meditation: Hebrews 1

“1 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”