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Genesis 31

(2019)

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Genesis 31

Topics.

- Laban's sons accuse Jacob of taking all their father's wealth.
- The LORD tells Jacob, return to his homeland and He will be with him.
- Jacob in a dream sees goats giving birth to striped and spotted calves.
- Rachel and Leah accuse Laban of taking their children's wealth.
- Jacob goes to his father Isaac and Rachel steals her father's gods.
- God in a dream tells Laban not to say anything good or bad to Jacob.
- Laban accuses Jacob of not allowing him to kiss his family farewell.
- Jacob tells Laban whoever stole his household gods will not live.
- Jacob and Laban make a covenant, "The LORD watch between us."
- The God of Abraham the God of Nahor, the God of their father.
- Laban kisses his grandchildren and his daughters and returned home.

FOR INFORMATION: concerning people, places and the meaning of words see the title: "Map Locations and People of the Bible," and the title: "Bible Dictionary" on Website Menu.

The previous chapter: in chapter thirty the focus was upon the bitter rivalry between Rachel and Leah and on Rachel servant Bilhah by Jacob giving birth to Dan and Naphtali; Leah's servant Zilpah by Jacob giving birth to Gad, Asher, Issachar and Zebulun and Rachel purchasing mandrakes from Leah and giving birth to Joseph. The chapter ended with Jacob breeding striped, speckled and spotted livestock.

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GENESIS 31:1-2

Laban's Sons Accuse Jacob of Taking all their Father's Wealth.

- **Genesis 31:1-2:** Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, "Jacob has taken all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has gained all this wealth."
²And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him with favor as before.

This chapter is a continuation of the previous chapter in which Laban and Jacob agreed that all the speckled and spotted livestock that was born of Laban's flock would be Jacob's wages for the extra years he served him after the fourteen years he had served Laban for the hand of Rachel in marriage.

- Twenty years I (Jacob) have been in your (Laban's) house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flock (Gen. 31:41).

Jacob took the sticks of trees, peeled the bark off and placed them in front of the sheep as they were mating and as they drank from the water troughs and they gave birth to speckled and spotted lambs which were the property of Jacob. In this way his flocks and livestock greatly multiplied. This is why Laban's sons were accusing him of taking what was their father's. Up until now Laban had looked upon Jacob with affection, but not so much because he had great affection for him, but because under Jacob's shepherding Laban's flocks greatly multiplied and, in this

way, he became a very wealthy man. However, circumstances have now changed in that Jacob's flocks have greatly multiplied above Laban's flocks and are far stronger and healthier than Laban's.

GENESIS 31:3-9

The LORD tells Jacob to Return to His Homeland.

- **Genesis 31:3-9:** Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you." ⁴So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was ⁵and said to them, "I see that your father does not regard me with favor as he did before. But the God of my father has been with me. ⁶You know that I have served your father with all my strength, ⁷yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times. But God did not permit him to harm me. ⁸If he (God) said, 'The spotted shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore spotted; and if he said, 'The striped (ringstraked in KJV) shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore striped (ringstraked in KJV). ⁹Thus God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me.

Ringstraked (stripped in the ESB): comes from the Hebrew word (*`aqod*) it literally means striped with bands. The King James Bible uses the word ringstraked while the English Standard Bible uses the word stripped, both of these words carry the same idea. It simply means that the animal has strips on its coat (i.e., long thin rectangular marks) of different colours to the main colour of the animal.

The word speckled comes from the Hebrew word *naqod*) meaning spotted and the word spotted comes from the Hebrew word (*tala'*), meaning spotted with different colours while the word, mottled (grisled in KJV) comes from the Hebrew word (*barod*), it also means spotted. This shows that the words ringstraked, speckled, spotted, mottled and grisled all carry a similar idea which is that the animal would have various size patches and shapes of different colours upon their coats, some of these patch's would appear spotted in shape (i.e., circular) while others would appear more like strips on its coat (i.e., long thin rectangular marks) of different colours to the main colour of the animal.

Return to the land of your fathers and your kindred: (v3) refers to land of Canaan in which his fathers had sojourned and where he was born and his father, mother and brother all dwelt at this time. The land which God promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and to their offspring. After more than twenty years it is certain that Jacob would have desired to return to his family and relatives.

I will be with you: (v3) means that God would be with Jacob to protect him from any harm that Laban or Esau might attempt to do to him.

The God of my father has been with me: (v5) this shows that Jacob was very conscious that it was not by his wisdom and efforts alone that he prospered, but by God's favour toward him.

Your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times: (v5) even though Jacob had worked hard and been faithful in keeping Laban's cattle he changed his wages ten times. Though Laban may have literally deceived him ten times, it is more likely that it is an expression that simply means he deceived him a lot or as much or as often as he could. It is likely that everytime Laban saw Jacob prospering Laban reduced his wages. This is no doubt one of the reasons why, when Jacob asked Laban, after Rachel had given birth to Joseph too send him away so that he could go to his own home and country and Laban said, "Name your wages, and I will give it," Jacob refused his offer. (Gen. 30:28-32). It is also most likely why the angel of God had showed Jacob in a dream sheep and goats breeding and giving birth to speckled, spotted and mottled lambs and calves (Gen. 31:10-12).

God did not permit him to harm me: (v7) the harm in this context does not refer to physical harm, but to attempting to rob Jacob of what was rightfully his by constantly changing his wages. God prevented him from being able to do this by telling Jacob that the spotted and the striped (ringstraked in KJV) animals shall be his wages and in this way God took away the livestock of Laban and gave them to Jacob (v8-9) since the greater portion of livestock born were spotted and striped (ringstraked in KJV). Jacob refused Laban's offer of wages and instead entered into a binding contract with him to take only the speckled, spotted and striped animals of Laban's flock for his wages (Gen. 30:28-32), because God had shown him in a dream the animals giving birth to speckled and spotted lambs (Gen. 31:10-12), it was in this way that God did not permit Laban to harm Jacob and in this way that God had taken away the livestock of Laban and given them to Jacob (v9).

God gave the livestock to me: (v9), this statement of Jacob's shows that Jacob was by faith bound to God and trusted Him for his care and success, but at the same time used all legitimate means to attain his desired end. As a skillful shepherd he did all that he could from his own hands which was right and proper, but would be of no avail had not God's favour been toward him. This is why he is able to say, "God took the livestock and gave them to me."

GENESIS 31:10-13

Jacob sees Goats Giving Birth to Striped and Spotted Calves.

- **Genesis 31:10-13:** In the breeding season of the flock I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream that the goats that mated with the flock were striped, spotted, and mottled. ¹¹Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am!' ¹²And he said, 'Lift up your eyes and see, all the goats that mate with the flock are striped, spotted, and mottled, for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. ¹³I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go out from this land and return to the land of your kindred."

Jacob is now in the field with his two wives, Rachel and Leah (v4) telling them of the dream he had concerning Laban's livestock giving birth to striped, spotted and mottled animals and how their father has attempted to cheat him out of what was rightfully his and that God had told him to return to the land of his kindred.

I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar: (v13) the angel of God was the speaker, but the words were those of the LORD God Almighty. He now commands Jacob to return to his homeland and promises that He will protect him. The title, "I am the God of Bethel," is a reference back to the time when Jacob went to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethel to take as a wife from one of the daughters of Laban in Haran. At, this time he had a dream of angels ascending and descending on a ladder from heaven to earth and the LORD said, "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 promised you." (Gen. 28:1-15). After this amazing dream Jacob awoke early in the morning and:

- Took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first. ²⁰Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, ²¹so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God." (Gen. 28:18-22).

It is to this occasion that the words, "I am the God of Bethel where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me," (v13) refer too. By mentioning it here God shows His acceptance of Jacob's actions and his mindfulness of his years of past loyalty and faithful in his work and service that he had

done for Laban and to show that He was now going to fulfil the promise He made to him at Bethel. God now tells Jacob to arise and depart from the land of Mesopotamia (or Syria), and leave the city of Haran where he was and Laban lived and return with his wives, his children, servants, livestock and possessions to the land of Canaan, the place of his birth and where his relations lived. This appearance of God to Jacob as the God of Bethel was at the close of his six years' service to Laban (Gen. 31:41) to provide for his own house as the Lord permitted him, by taking the speckled and spotted livestock for his wages with the full knowledge and agreement of Laban.

GENESIS 31:14-16

Rachel and Leah Accuse Laban of taking their Children's Wealth.

- **Genesis 31:14-16:** Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? ¹⁵Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has indeed devoured our money. ¹⁶All the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, whatever God has said to you, do."

Rachel and Leah both agree that their father's behaviour toward their husband had been extremely mean-spirited, miserly, and tight-fisted even to them, his own children so much so that they wondered if there was any hope of a benefit (i.e., inheritance) for them. Jacob, after seeing that his wives agreed that their father had been selfish in dealing with him and approved of his intended departure, he makes all the necessarily preparations for a hasty and secret flight. Laban prospered greatly because of Jacob's loyal service, yet he never intended to leave his two daughters and their children any inheritance, but rather keep all that he had to himself or planned to give it to his sons. Therefore, it would be in vain for them to stay since they could expect nothing by remaining with their father and because of this they were willing to leave their father's house, and go with Jacob.

Are we not regarded by him as foreigners: (v15) by selling his two daughters to Jacob for fourteen years' service and then take all the money and profit he had gained from Jacob's work for his own selfish use he treated Rachel and Leah as strangers rather than as his children. Jacob looked upon the wealth which God had transferred from Laban to him as his wages, Rachel and Leah look upon it as their portions. By giving Jacob the dream of the speckled and spotted animals God forced Laban to pay his debts, both to Jacob his servant and to his two daughters.

Jacob departs when Laban is at some distance away shearing his sheep (v19) Jacob departs with his family, his servants, all his flocks, cattle and possessions that rightly belonged to him to go to his father's house in the land of Canaan; but it was some years before he actually arrived, staying at various places on the way.

GENESIS 31:17-19

Jacob goes to Isaac and Rachel Steals Her Father's gods.

- **Genesis 31:17-19:** So Jacob arose and set his sons and his wives on camels. ¹⁸He drove away all his livestock, all his property that he had gained, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac. ¹⁹Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's household gods (images in KJV).

While Laban is away shearing his sheep, Jacob makes his hasty and secret flight taking all that was his and nothing more. Some may think that Jacob should have given Laban due notice, but when a person feels themselves in danger the law of self-preservation supersedes the duty of everyday

life. Verse thirty-one tells us that Jacob's great fear was not so much that Laban would physically harm him, but that he would by force take his two daughters Rachel and Leah from him (v31) which would also mean that he would take their children. Laban had the means and the manpower to do this so Jacob's fear was valid on a worldly level, especially since Laban's sons already believed Jacob had gained all that he had, by taking their fathers wealth and Laban no longer had regard for him (v1-2), but since God had said to him, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you," (v3) it showed a lack of trust in God on a spiritual level. It would seem that both God and Jacob suspected that Laban might do Jacob some harm or at least not allow him to take what rightfully belonged to him especially since Jacob concerning Laban said, "If the fear of God and the fear of his father Isaac, had not been on his side it is most certain Laban would have sent him away empty-handed." (v42). It is also certain if God had not told Laban in a dream during the night not to say anything good or bad to Jacob which implies that he is not to harm him in any way (v22-24) he would have forced his will upon Jacob.

Rachel stole her father's gods ((images in KJV): (v19) the word images comes from the Hebrew word (*t^eraphiym*) it literally means a healer and refers to a family idol or an image of an idol. It is not the intention of Scripture to go into detail concerning the different kinds of false worship and characteristics of the many idols and gods people believed in. For these reasons we know very little of Laban's gods, except that they were valued and treasured by him even though he acknowledged the true God. It is difficult to understand why Rachel would steal her father's gods, especially since Jacob, during their many years of marriage would have shared with her all that he knew of God and the promises God had made to him and all that He had shown him by dreams and visions. Following are seven possible reasons that may help give some insight and explain (though with no certainty) why Rachel would do such a thing:

1. She still had a superstitious family attachment to them (much like people today who believe in lucky charms).
2. She had been raised as a child under her father's belief in these gods and over the many years of growing up her undeveloped mind had been indoctrinated with the teaching of them.
3. She had many times prayed with her family and individually before them and to them (maybe even offered sacrifices).
4. Many at this time who had been raised under the true faith of Israel's God added to their faith other gods. Throughout the Old Testament this was the greatest and one of the most common sin kings and the people of Israel committed before the LORD.
5. Though she still held onto a superstitious belief in her father's gods does not mean that she did not also acknowledge the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the same way that her father Laban did.
6. Her belief in her father's gods were reinforced by the fact that her father Laban constantly had the power and authority over her husband Jacob and the fact her husband greatly feared Laban. Observing these two things she would naturally reason that her father's gods must have the greater power or at least some power since the people of this early era credited all things, good or bad either to the true God or to other gods.
7. Though at some level she believed in the God of Jacob she also believed that she would increase her chances of her family arriving safely in Jacob's homeland if she took her father's gods

With these seven facts in mind it is a little easier to understand why she never fully forsook her superstitious belief in her father's gods, even today many who have been raised as a child and grown up under the influence

of a false religion or false teaching and receive the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ still find it hard to shake off all the erroneous doctrines that they were taught as a child and grew up with.

Ponder for a moment: the foolishness of believing in a god that human men can steal, truly such a god is a most pathetic god. Enemies may steal our goods, but they can never steal our God. People will pretend to or confess to believe in God even when they have no love for Him in their hearts if it is to their advantage to do so. (Matthew Henry). Those that confess to believe in the God of Abraham and at the same time embrace other gods are like those in past times and in our times, who wish to serve both God and mammon. Great numbers will acknowledge the true God in words, but their hearts are far from Him. When a person gives themselves up to covetousness and greed their true god is the world and mammon (i.e., money, profit and worldly possessions).

GENESIS 31:20-24

God tells Laban Not to say Anything Good or Bad to Jacob.

- **Genesis 31:20-24:** And Jacob tricked Laban the Aramean, by not telling him that he intended to flee. ²¹He fled with all that he had and arose and crossed the Euphrates, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead. ²²When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled, ²³he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him for seven days and followed close after him into the hill country of Gilead. ²⁴But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night and said to him, "Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad."

The hill country of Gilead: (v23) is an extensive range of hills forming the eastern boundary of Canaan.

The third day: (v22) Laban hears that Jacob had fled and immediately pursues him. Since he was not encumbered with a young family and numerous flocks as Jacob was he advanced rapidly and after seven days' journey caught up to Jacob in the hills of Gilead. Had God not warned Laban in a dream not to prevent his nephew's from continuing on their journey, he being accompanied by his sons and a number of his people may have used violence against Jacob.

Speak not to Jacob either good or bad: (v24) God appears to Laban on behalf of Jacob, and warns him, "Not to speak good or bad," Not to speak good, means that Laban was not to attempt to persuade Jacob to return with him to Haran, with flattering and deceptive promises or cunning deceptions and trickeries or with a promise of good things, or of what great things he would do for him. Not to speak bad, means that Laban was not to abstain from any language that expresses violence. He was not to threaten Jacob with by physical or verbal threats or what he would do to him if he would not comply with his demands or refuses to return with him. Laban was to say nothing against Jacob continuing on with his journey, because it was the will of God that he should continue onward toward the land of Canaan and his homeland (v13).

GENESIS 31:25-28

Laban Accuses Jacob of Not Allowing Him to Farewell His Family.

- **Genesis 31:25-28:** And Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsmen pitched tents in the hill country of Gilead. ²⁶And Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done, that you have tricked me and driven away my daughters like captives of the sword? ²⁷Why did you flee secretly and trick me, and did not tell me, so that I might have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre? ²⁸And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? Now you have done foolishly."

Laban sets up his tents in the hill country of Gilead where Jacob was also camped. Laban's accusation that Jacob had driven his daughters away like captives of the sword (v26) is not correct, since both Rachel and Leah said to their husband, "Our father treats us as foreigners (i.e., strangers), he has sold us and devoured our money so do whatever God has said to you, do." (v14-16).

Why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? (v28) in the East it is customary for their family, relatives and friends to say good-bye with musical instruments and songs when anyone is setting out to travel to a land a great distance away. Laban no doubt had an affection for his daughters and their children, but not strong enough to supersede his greed and selfishness. He wished that Jacob would not depart from him at all, not because of the great love he had for him and his family, but to recover as much of his property as he could from him. Laban's charge against Jacob that he deprived him of the joy of giving him and his family the usual salutations at parting was hypocritical, since even his own daughters felt that their father had treated them as a man would treat foreigners and strangers.

It is in my power to do you harm: (v29) this statement of Laban's clearly shows that he initially began his pursuit after Jacob with enough men to physically overpower Jacob should he refuse to submit to his demands. It is most certain he would have used this strength against Jacob had God not restrained him. Even though Laban greatly valued and treasured his household gods, he recognised that the power of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was far greater and therefore obeyed His words. Keep in mind Laban would be fully aware of God's power manifested in the Exodus from Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, His power on Mount Sinai and the victories He gave His people over the nations etc.

The God of your fathers spoke to me last night: (v29) (yesternight in KJV meaning, last night) though Laban worshipped his household gods and however great his rage and anger may have been he paid heed to the heavenly vision. He may have supposed that right was on his side and he certainly had the strength to revenge himself and recover what he believed was his, yet he submits himself to the restraint of God's power; he dared not harm Jacob who he now clearly knew was under God's watchful eye and care.

What have you done: (v29) Laban with this question, infers that he would have honourably and affectionately dismissed Jacob and therefore his departing in secret was not only uncalled-for, but also an act of unkindness toward him.

GENESIS 31:29-30

God tells Laban Not to say anything Good or Bad to Jacob.

- **Genesis 31:29-30:** It is in my power to do you harm. But the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.'³⁰ And now you have gone away because you longed greatly for your father's house, but why did you steal my gods?"

Laban's words, "You have gone away because you longed greatly for your father's house," shows that Laban recognized Jacob's yearning to return to his homeland and his family. Twenty years ago Rachel fearing Esau would kill her younger son Jacob as he had threatened to do told Jacob to flee to Haran (Gen. 27:41-45). Now after twenty years of being away (Gen. 31:41)) Jacob longs to return to his family home. It is interesting to notice that Laban says, "The God of your father spoke to me," (v29) when it is considered that Jacob's God was originally also Laban's God. This statement of Laban's and his denial that Jacob's God was his God, shows how much he had fallen into idolatry and how much value he placed on his household gods and how little he valued the God of Abraham in his

personal life. God had spoken to Laban saying, "Speak neither good or bad to Jacob," (v24) even though Laban was furious with Jacob for departing in secret because it was against his own interest and he could have taken back what he supposed belonged to him since he had the superior power over Jacob his conscience would not allow him to keep what God had said secret or allow him to do any harm to Jacob, which it is almost certain he would have done had he not been restrained by Jacob's God. For further information concerning Jacobs gods, see the title:

- Rachel stole her father's gods ((images in KJV), following (v19) (above).

GENESIS 31:31-35

Jacob tells Laban whoever stole His Household gods will Not Live.

- **Genesis 31:31-35:** Jacob answered and said to Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force. ³²Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live. In the presence of our kinsmen point out what I have that is yours, and take it." Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them. ³³So Laban went into Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two female servants, but he did not find them. And he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's. ³⁴Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them in the camel's saddle and sat on them. Laban felt all about the tent, but did not find them. ³⁵And she said to her father, "Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me." So he searched but did not find the household gods.

Here we discover that the reason Jacob fled was for fear that Laban would by force take his two daughters Rachel and Leah who he had given to Jacob for wives and who Jacob had worked fourteen years for. (v31).

The camels saddle: (v34) during these ancient times the saddles of camel were made in such a way that they could be used as seats when camping and made with saddle bags that would hang on the sides of the camel which were used for storage while travelling. It was in these side saddles bags that Rachel had placed Laban's gods. Upon arriving at the place Jacob stopped to camp Rachel dismounted her camel, took off the saddle with the saddle bags and placed them in her tent. It is not hard to imagine the fear Rachel must have felt when she heard her husband say to Laban, ""Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live," (v32) and the terror when she saw Laban leave off searching Leah's tent and walking toward hers. She immediately sits herself upon the saddle and from the fear of being caught pleads the custom of women is upon her as an excuse for not standing (v35). From respect for his daughter Laban accepts her excuse. It is also possible that he thought that she would not sit on their sacred household gods while she was in such a condition. Laban did not find who stole his gods so Rachel was not put to death, however she did later die giving birth to Benjamin (Gen. 35:16-19).

GENESIS 31:36-42

Laban would have Sent Jacob away Empty-Handed if God was Not with Him.

- **Genesis 31:36-42:** Then Jacob became angry and berated Laban. Jacob said to Laban, "What is my offense? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me? ³⁷For you have felt through all my goods; what have you found of all your household goods? Set it here before my kinsmen and your kinsmen, that they may decide between us two. ³⁸These twenty years I have been with you. Your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks. ³⁹What was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you. I bore the loss of it myself. From my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. ⁴⁰There I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. ⁴¹These twenty years I have been in your house.

I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. ⁴²If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night."

in Palestine the heat of the day during certain seasons is extremely hot and bitterly cold at night, under these temperatures Jacob had worked long hours and honestly in his service for Laban. He knew he had not stolen Laban's gods and had done him no wrong, so it is very likely that his anger grew somewhat as he watched Laban treating him as a common thief while he searched his camp for his gods and for anything else that might belong to Laban. At the end of the search Laban finds nothing and Jacob (not knowing his wife Rachel had stolen Laban's gods) rebukes him for treating him as a criminal.

GENESIS 31:43-50

Jacob and Laban make a Covenant saying, "The LORD watch Between Us."

- **Genesis 31:43-50:** Then Laban answered and said to Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day for these my daughters or for their children whom they have borne? ⁴⁴Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I. And let it be a witness between you and me." ⁴⁵So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. ⁴⁶And Jacob said to his kinsmen, "Gather stones." And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. ⁴⁷Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. ⁴⁸Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." Therefore he named it Galeed, ⁴⁹and Mizpah, for he said, "The LORD watch between you and me, when we are out of one another's sight. ⁵⁰If you oppress my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, although no one is with us, see, God is witness between you and me."

9

After Jacob and Laban had expressed their pent-up feelings of anger toward each other Laban though not willing to own his own faults as he should have done and not being able to justify himself or condemn Jacob suggests that he and Jacob make a covenant to which Jacob agrees. Jacob takes a stone and sets it up as a pillar to stand as a witness to this covenant. Laban and Jacob ratified the covenant by erecting a stone pillar. It is very likely that the heap of stones that the men gathered were laid in a circular pile to serve as seats, and in the center of this circle a very large stone was set up vertically to serve as an altar.

It is also likely that they offered a sacrifice on this altar and then had the feast of reconciliation with Jacob's and Laban's family seated on the stones surrounding the pillar. Even to this day heaps of stones that have been used as memorials in this manner are found in the region where Jacob and Laban set up this stone pillar.

Laban gave the pillar and heap of stones the following three names:

1. **Jegarsahadutha:** (v47) comes from the Hebrew word (*Y^egar Sahaduwtha'*) it literally means to gather, to testify as a witness and carries the idea of a heap of testimony or witness.
2. **Galeed:** (v48) comes from the Hebrew word (*Gal`ed*) and literally means heap of testimony. It carries the idea of a sure or prince witness.
3. **Mizpah:** (v49) comes from the Hebrew word (*Mitspah*) it literally means watch tower, meaning it would act as a watchtower between Jacob and Laban.

Jacob called the pillar and heap of stones Galeed (v47) (see the meaning above)

Summary the pillar of stones: all three names signify the same thing, "An heap of witness." Laban and Jacob gave it these names to remind them and their future generations of the covenant they made before the LORD and Judge of all who dwell on earth. God is judge between fighting, quarrelling and waring individuals, groups and nations and He will never judge with partiality (i.e., show favour), but will always judge righteously; whoever does wrong bring God's judgment upon themselves. After expressing their anger toward each other, erecting the pillar and eating a feast together they part friends. After covenants of friendship were ratified in ancient times it was common for the parties involved to celebrate their union of peace by eating and drinking together.

GENESIS 31:51-52

Laban and Jacob agree Not to do Each other Harm.

- **Genesis 31:51-52:** Then Laban said to Jacob, "See this heap and the pillar, which I have set between you and me. ⁵²This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, to do harm.

In verse forty-three we read of Jacob saying to Laban, "Come now, let us make a covenant to be a witness between you and me,." so Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar and then said to his kinsmen, "Gather stones," and they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. During this meal Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today," and after some conversation, he says to Jacob "See this heap and pillar which I have set between you and me, let it be a witness that I will not pass over this heap to you, and you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, to do harm." (Gen. 31:43-52). Both Jacob and Laban claim that they erected the heap and pillar of stones. It is likely that the heap of stones was gathered and erected by Laban and his men and the pillar was erected by Jacob and those with him or the stones were gathered and the pillar erected on the orders of both Laban and Jacob. It seems that sometime after Laban had finished his search and found that Jacob had not stolen his gods and after being rebuked by Jacob for treating him as a thief he re-affirms the covenant they had both agreed to in the previous verses and states that the heap and pillar of stones they had erected would act as a witness to them, their families and their descendants of the covenant of peace and of friendship they had made. Even to this day heaps of stones, that have been used in this way as memorials, are found in the region where Laban and Jacob made this covenant.

10

GENESIS 31:53-54

The God of Abraham the God of Nahor, the God of their Father.

- **Genesis 31:53-54:** The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac, ⁵⁴and Jacob offered a sacrifice in the hill country and called his kinsmen to eat bread. They ate bread and spent the night in the hill country.

Following are the two most common thoughts amongst different commentators concerning Laban's words, "The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father."

1. Because Laban placed great value upon his gods some say that when he said, "The God of their father," he was referring to Abraham's father Terah and the religion he practiced when he dwelt in Ur of the Chaldees and by doing so was combining the faith he had with his gods with the faith Jacob had with his God and in this way was joining idols with the true God, perhaps believing that the most ancient religion practiced in

Ur of the Chaldees was also a true religion. Based upon this idea it is said that Jacob being fully aware that idolatry had crept in amongst Nahor's family line (at least through Laban) that to separate himself from Laban's mixed religion with idols and the true God swore by the "fear of his father Isaac," meaning, by the true God that his father Isaac feared, worshipped and served and in this way Jacob and Laban were swearing by their own deities.

2. It is almost certain that after Abraham had shared with Terah his father all that God had revealed and spoken to him that Terah turned from his gods to worship the true God, especially since the Scriptures tell us that Terah left his hometown and took Abram, Lot and Sarai from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan. (Gen. 11:31). We also know that Laban was raised under the faith of the true God and that he not only recognised God's voice when He warned him not to not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad, but also referred to Him as the God of Jacob's father and obeyed what He had said to him (Gen. 31:29). With these facts in mind it is more likely that Laban's words, "The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father," simply mean that even though Laban had embraced idolatry he still acknowledged the true God.

Jacob offered a sacrifice eat bread: (v54) it was common practice to offer a sacrifice to the LORD to ratify a covenant made before Him and then follow the sacrifice with a meal of celebration. The sacrifice here was a peace offering, after it had been offered to the LORD it like most other animal and food offerings was not discarded or thrown away, but became part of the meal that those who shared in the worship of the LORD ate together. Almost all sacrifices throughout the Old Testament became food for the priests and their families.

GENESIS 31:55

11

Laban Kisses His Grandchildren and Daughters.

- **Genesis 31:55:** Early in the morning Laban arose and kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned home.

After sharing a meal of friendship together, sleeping and rising in the morning, Laban blesses his grandchildren and his daughters most likely with a prayer of good wishes and some kind of parting gift and then departs from them with an endearing kiss goodbye.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.
