

Pentwater Bible Church

The Contract & Jacob's Message to Esau
Genesis Message Sixty-Six
Genesis 31: 43- 32: 21



Reconciliation of Jacob and Esau by Rubens 1624 from The National Galleries of Scotland

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Review:

LABAN CONFRONTS JACOB

Genesis 31: 22-30

Laban was told about Jacob and all his entourage leaving Paddan-Aram three days after they had gone. Laban accompanied by his clan took seven days to catch Jacob since Jacob had a three-day head start. Laban finally overtook Jacob in the mountains of Gilead, which is south east of the Sea of Galilee on the east side of the Jordan River east of Shechem. Laban was angry with Jacob. Laban had three reasons for pursuing Jacob. He wanted to continue the indentured servitude and more importantly he wanted his gods back. He found value in these idols. From the text it appears that Laban was going to wreak vengeance on Jacob when he found him. Something happened to Laban the night before he caught up with Jacob; the Lord God appeared to him in a dream and said, *"Take heed to thyself that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad."*

Genesis writer identifies Laban as a Syrian that is, a pagan. God told Laban to stay neutral when confronting Jacob (*"Take heed to thyself that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad"*). Apparently he was just ready to confront Jacob with his anger and hurt him until God warned him not to do that. When he confronted Jacob he started the diatribe against him with his secret flight away from him. He said, *"What hast thou done, that thou hast stolen away unawares to me, and carried away my daughters as captives of the sword?"* Then he let him know that he wanted to have a feast at his departing. Laban asked, *"Wherefore didst thou flee secretly, and steal away from me, and didst not tell me, that I might have sent thee away with mirth and with songs, with tabret and with harp."* Finally, in this first verbal attack Laban cites the third reason to pursue Jacob, that his feelings were supposedly wounded. He said he did not get to kiss his children. He said, *"and didst not suffer me to kiss my sons and my daughters?"* Now Laban concluded his verbal attack on Jacob by saying, *"now hast thou done foolishly."* Interestingly, as Laban initially characterizes the situation as a theft he quick moves it from the legal to the personal by claiming to be hurt. Now Laban reveals his true intent toward Jacob, to hurt him if God had not intervened. Laban recognized that Jehovah was the God of Jacob but not his god. But he did as God had said He must do. He told Jacob the nature of the command. He said, *"but the God of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take heed to thyself that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad."* Laban knew that Jehovah God had told him to stay neutral with Jacob and this included trying to get him back to Paddan-Aram. He realizes that Jacob needed to go back to his family in Israel. However, he concludes this segment of his verbal attack with a question that even if the secret departure can be explained, the theft of his gods cannot.

JACOB RESPONDS TO LABAN

Genesis 31: 31-2

Jacob admitted that he sneaked away perhaps mistakenly, but he did not believe that Laban would ever let him go and if so he would probably try and hold Rachel and Leah in Paddan-Aram by force. This would have made it impossible for him to leave because he was not going to abandon his family. This certainly implies that Laban would have used the daughters as leverage to keep Jacob thereby having his servitude continue. Both Leah and Rachel knew his temperament and affirmed that with Jacob just before they left Paddan-Aram (Genesis 31: 14-16). Laban stated that his actual plan, which was stopped by God, was to do just the opposite of what he was saying. Then Jacob says the flight was justified, because he feared that Laban might have robbed him of his wives by force. He implies that this was a more realistic prospect than the joyous send-off Laban was bemoaning being deprived of. Laban, it should be noted, used the Hebrew verb *ganav* גָּנַב “to steal,” three times. Jacob’s answer uses the much harsher *gazel*, גָּזַל, “to remove by force, or to kidnap.” Laban was threatened that some day with the *teraphim* Jacob could come back to Paddan-Aram and claim Laban’s property. This was the chief reason he pursued Jacob. He wanted the *teraphim* back. He really didn’t care about anything else in his selfishness and worldly attitude. This is pure covetousness on Laban’s part. It drives people to do harmful things to others. Later under the Mosaic Law (Cir. 1443 B.C.) it would be codified as a general safeguard against many other sins, particularly commandments six through nine (murder, adultery, stealing, and false testimony). Israelites were not to long for, desire earnestly, or lust after what legitimately belonged to others. Even though Christians are not under the Mosaic Law we are nevertheless prohibited from these activities in the New Testament within Christ’s Law for us as Christians. So Jacob openly in front of witnesses, in his ignorance of Rachel’s theft let’s Laban examine his camp for what he believes was stolen from him. Jacob issues a death penalty on the perpetrator of the theft. The death penalty was actually issued on Rachel. Now she lived for a while longer but she died young. Perhaps to only thirty-nine years of age. The Orthodox Jews say that she died as a result of this death penalty that Jacob issued (Bereshit Rabbah 84: 9).

RACHEL HIDES THE TERAPHIM

Genesis 31: 33-35

Laban begins his search and starts with Jacob’s tent. He then moves to Leah’s and Bilhah and Zilpah’s tents. He finally goes to Rachel’s tent. She had previously put the *teraphim* in a compartment of her saddle called a *palanquin*. She was sitting on this in the tent when Laban arrive for an inspection. As Laban is feeling around the tent and not finding the *teraphim* Rachel asks to be excused in that she is menstruating and cannot rise to appropriately greet him, calling him her “lord.” The ancient Israelites viewed the menstruating woman as unclean and men would avoid them until their period was concluded with a *mikveh* or ritual bath for purity. This was finally codified in the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 15: 19-24). Until then any person coming in contact with her and even the common household objects would be considered unclean which was they perceived to be communicably transmittable to others. So Laban wanting to avoid the perceived

contaminating effect of Rachel's menses leaves her alone. Her saddle (palanquin) was therefore untouched by Laban and he did not find the *teraphim*.

JACOB ANGER TOWARD LABAN

Genesis 31: 36-42

As a result of Laban failing to find any evidence of a theft of his *teraphim* Jacob got real angry with him. He asked him, "where was his evidence of a theft?" Now Jacob was going to forcefully let Laban know exactly how bad a father in law he was. Jacob goes from being the accused to the accuser toward Laban. Jacob cites five positive individual characteristics of his service to Laban for twenty years.

1. None of any of Laban's ewes and she-goats ever miscarried
2. Jacob never ate any of the flocks when he was hungry
3. Jacob bore the loss of any of the flock destroyed by wild animals. In the ancient shepherders code of conduct an overseer could claim *force-majeur* by providing evidence of the loss and thereby avoid personal responsibility. Jacob absorbed the loss himself and not Laban.
4. Jacob had to make good for stolen property himself.
5. He suffered many sleepless nights over his responsibility to guard the flock.

Jacob could have had an even greater gain had he not sacrificed his personal gain for Laban. He could have claimed his rights under the prevailing laws such as those found in the ancient Code of Hammurabi.

Now still on the attack he begins to recount the cheating that Laban had exercised upon him for many years. He starts with the forced fourteen-year servitude for Rachel instead of the agreed upon seven. He then says Laban changed his wages ten times over the twenty years. In all aspects of the agreements between the two men it was Laban who proved untrustworthy not Jacob. Jacob concluded this with his reliance on Jehovah's intervention to correct Laban's nefarious ploys. Laban would never have given Jacob the traditionally required severance payment without which he would have remained poor and unable to provide for his family without Laban's assistance. Laban's plan was to keep Jacob in servitude. Laban now realized that Jacob had come full circle from a dependent poor stranger to a wealthy man who did not need or would not be intimidated by Laban. Laban could do nothing to Jacob except end the relationship on some superficially amicable terms. Laban was beaten and realized it. God is in control of all things and he used Laban to correct Jacob but not to irreparably harm him. Jacob grew mightily during his time with Laban and God's Abrahamic Covenant is evident as Jacob is the beneficiary.

Today's Message:

THE TREATY OF GALEED

Genesis 31: 43-55

⁴³And Laban answered and said unto Jacob, The daughters are my daughters, and the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, and all that thou seest is mine: and what can I do this day unto these my daughters, or unto their children whom they have borne? ⁴⁴And now come, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee. ⁴⁵And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. ⁴⁶And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones; and they took stones, and made a heap: and they did eat there by the heap. ⁴⁷And Laban called it Jegar-saha-dutha: but Jacob called it Galeed. ⁴⁸And Laban said, This heap is witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed: ⁴⁹and Mizpah, for he said, Jehovah watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another. ⁵⁰If thou shalt afflict my daughters, and if thou shalt take wives besides my daughters, no man is with us; see, God is witness betwixt me and thee. ⁵¹And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold the pillar, which I have set betwixt me and thee. ⁵²This heap be witness, and the pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm. ⁵³The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac. ⁵⁴And Jacob offered a sacrifice in the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mountain. ⁵⁵And early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them: and Laban departed and returned unto his place (ASV 1901).

Jacob's truthful words to Laban clearly cut Laban to the heart. He was publically exposed as a scoundrel, and now using emotion to assuage the situation. Then Laban clearly losing the confrontation with Jacob tries to save face by making two claims.

1. First he says that the daughters, children and flocks belong to him.
2. Second he claims that he has some power over his daughters and grandchildren.

Both of these claims were charades. He knew that his daughters were given to Jacob as wives in a work arrangement, which lasted for fourteen years. He also knew that Jehovah God had stopped him from harming Jacob as originally intended. Clearly still trying to preserve his dignity in this situation he proposes a treaty with Jacob to accurately frame the independence of Jacob from Laban after twenty years of servitude. In so doing Laban states the purpose of the treaty, which was: to "*let it be for a witness between me and thee.*" Laban was concerned that now that he was exposed Jacob might try and harm him! When one has an evil heart he sees others as capable of the same. When one's heart is pure he usually does not conceive of other concocting evil against them. This is why the Lord Jesus warned his first wave of disciples who he sent out as evangelists to be wary of the culture.

Matthew 10: 16

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves

Jacob quickly assents to the treaty and immediately begins to set a stone as the foundation for a pillar to commemorate the event. He then instructs his children (brethren) to, “*Gather stones; and they took stones, and made a heap: and they did eat there by the heap.*” Following customary second millennial B.C. custom they had a meal to celebrate and affirm the covenant. This covenant was designated to assure peace between the two groups. Then came the naming of the marker.

Laban initiated the name calling it *Jeger-shah-dutha*, which in Aramaic means “the heap of witness.” Jacob the Hebrew making a clear distinction between the two groups, Pagans and Hebrews, called it Galeed. It has the same meaning but Jacob was clearly defining the physical as well as the religious boundary between the two. In Genesis 10: 22 Aram is designated, a son of Shem. Genesis 22: 21 also designates another person named Aram who is a grandson of Nahor, Abraham's brother. Aramean was from the earliest times the equivalent of heathen in the Jewish vernacular, because the heathen neighbors of the Jews used the Aramean tongue. The part of this territory known in the Old Testament as Aram is the portion west of the Euphrates. Greek writers referred to the people of this region as Syrians, which is probably a corruption of the Assyrians. This region is now called Syria.

The Aramaic language is classified as Semitic, and therefore indicates, that the Arameans were close to the Hebrews. From II Kings 18: 26 and Isaiah 36: 11 Semitic language scholars believe that by the end of the eighth century B.C. Aramaic had become the language of international communication between the nations of western Asia. Its influence on Hebrew diction can be seen in some of the books composed before the Exile (586 B.C.). In Esther, Ecclesiastes, and some of the Psalms the form of expression, not in the plain text, is largely Aramaic. Parts of Daniel and Ezra are actually written only in this language, which before the beginning of the Christian era had replaced Hebrew in daily usage.

Now the term Galeed is affirmed and strengthened by Laban with the title **מִצְפָּה** *Mizpah*. This Hebrew word means “watchtower.” Laban said to Jacob, “*Jehovah watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.*” One, he was affirming the Lord's place in controlling Jacob's life and two he was issuing a warning to him. Most take this verse out of context and misapply it to mean that the Lord will watch over us and protect us while we are separated from each other. As pleasant a thought and parting benediction between friends and loved ones this is, this is *not* the intent of this verse. It was a warning between two men who could not trust each other. The pillar and heap were erected, as a border between the two geographic regions so neither would cross over to the other's side. Laban knew the *teraphim* was stolen by somebody in Jacob's entourage, he just could not find it. Believing it provided claim to his property he did not want Jacob to come back to Paddan-Aram and laying claim to his estate. Laban then goes on to define the meaning of the heap of witness. He says if Jacob does two things he will come into divine judgment.

1. If he afflict Laban's daughters.
2. If he marries any additional women besides the two he has.

Then Laban says, “*see, God is witness betwixt me and thee.*” The Hebrew word for witness is *aid* אִיד which is the root of Galeed, thus the formation of the term Galeed. This covenant was made between two men who could not trust each other.

Jacob and Laban made a treaty to abide in peaceful coexistence. This was not to be long lasting. After the time of the Canaanite conquest by Joshua and settlement, Hebrew relations with the people of Aram were hostile. In fact even in the wilderness wandering (Cir. 1420 B.C.) the treaty boundary was breached. The king of Moab, Balak brought Balaam from Aram to curse the Jews (Numbers 23: 7). The geographical names *Gilead* and *Ramath-Mizpeh* (Joshua 13: 26), also *Mizpeh-Gilead* (Judges 11: 29), sound so obviously like *Galeed* and *Mizpah*, that they are connected, and stem from the monument erected by Jacob and Laban.

Since they had an agreement Laban clearly defines it as: “*I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm.*” Laban was taking much liberty with the term god when he referred to “*The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us.*” Abraham and Nahor’s father was Terah and he as well as Nahor did not worship the same God as Abraham. Jacob realizing this affirmed it with “*And Jacob sware by the Fear of his father Isaac*” the true God Jehovah Elohim. So they swear by their respective deities and Laban has some security that Jacob will not breach the boundary and render the usefulness of the teraphim null. Jacob does not care because he does not know it is in his possession. Jacob’s response was to offer a sacrifice, which he did, and they had a covenantal meal. Including the brethren who were his sons he obligates them to the terms of the agreement.

This narrative concludes with Laban getting up in the morning and kissing his daughters and grandsons (sons in the text) and depart back to Paddan-Aram. He seems to ignore Jacob, which is much different than the first meeting twenty years ago (Genesis 29: 13).

JACOB AND THE ANGELS

Genesis 32: 1-2

¹And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. ²And Jacob said when he saw them, This is God’s host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim (ASV 1901).

Jacob now leaves the place of the covenant, which is the mountains of Gilead to continue his journey back home. His travel back home was based upon three motivating influences.

1. He had a personal desire.
2. He had problems with Laban.
3. God had commanded him to go.

As he leaves angels again meet him as they did in Genesis 28: 12 when he was leaving the Land. Jacob was under God’s divine escort. Jacob saw them and said, “*This is*

God's Host." The Hebrew word for host is *machaneh*. He was saying this is "God's camp." He then named it Mahanaim, which means two camps. He was referring to his camp and God's camp (the angelic host). Mahanaim later played a significant role in Israel's history. It was one of the Levitical cities of refuge; Ishboshet, son of Saul, was crowned king there (II Samuel 2: 8); David fled there during the revolt of Absalom (II Samuel 17: 24, 17: 27); and in Solomon's day, it became a district capital (I Kings 4: 14). It was also a border town between the tribes of Manasseh and Gad (Joshua 13: 26, 13: 30)

JACOB'S MESSAGE TO ESAU

Genesis 32: 3-21

³And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the field of Edom. ⁴And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye say unto my lord Esau: Thus saith thy servant Jacob, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now: ⁵and I have oxen, and asses, and flocks, and men-servants, and maid-servants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in thy sight. ⁶And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and moreover he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him. ⁷Then Jacob was greatly afraid and was distressed: and he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks, and the herds, and the camels, into two companies; ⁸and he said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the company which is left shall escape. ⁹And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, O Jehovah, who saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will do thee good: ¹⁰I am not worthy of the least of all the loving kindnesses, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two companies. ¹¹Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he come and smite me, the mother with the children. ¹²And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude. ¹³And he lodged there that night, and took of that which he had with him a present for Esau his brother: ¹⁴two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, ¹⁵thirty milch camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty she-asses and ten foals. ¹⁶And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove. ¹⁷And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, Whose art thou? and whither goest thou? and whose are these before thee? ¹⁸then thou shalt say They are thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau: and, behold, he also is behind us. ¹⁹And he commanded also the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him; ²⁰and ye shall say, Moreover, behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept me. ²¹So the present passed over before him: and

he himself lodged that night in the company (ASV 1901).

Jacob had settled with Laban and was on the way home. He knew that he still had to deal with his twin brother Esau who had threatened to kill him. So knowing this he sent messengers to meet with Esau in the land of Seir. Esau had settled there. This was due south of Gilead where Jacob had met Laban. The field of Edom is designating that it is south of Ammon and Moab, which today is Jordan. Jacob sent his messengers to meet with Esau and started calling him the respectful title of lord. The message they are to convey has three components.

1. I have spent all the time gone from you with Laban (he avoids the conflict with Laban).
2. I have acquired much wealth.
3. I want to find favor in Esau's sight.

At this first mission of the emissaries they are to convey Jacob's intention to make peace with Esau. Jacob does not know what Esau's intentions are toward him. The messengers report back that Esau now called his brother not lord seems to already know he is in the region. They further report that Esau is coming with four hundred men to meet him. The standard size of militia in the OT seems to be about that level (I Samuel 22: 2, 25: 13, 30: 10, 17). Now Jacob gets concerned because he does not know if Esau coming with this army still means to kill him or not.

As soon as Jacob hears their report he responds in two ways. First he makes camp preparations. His fear is also mentioned as being greatly afraid and distressed. He saw fit to divide the camp in half to allow one half to escape from Esau's soldiers who might have been seeking revenge on Jacob. Second, he begins to pray. He asks Jehovah God to make good His promise to protect him as he faithfully returns home at God's command. Jacob also acknowledges that all God's lovingkindness and grace is laid upon an unworthy servant. He closes the pray stating that there are more promises yet to be fulfilled.

Jacob diplomatically offers to soften Esau's potential hostility by offering gifts. He offers 550 animals in all which is a substantial appeasement. The animals have significance to the Orthodox Hebrews as penned in notes to the Bereshit Rabbah number seventy-five. The ox and the ass each refer to their view of two Messiahs (Bereshit Rabbah 75: 6). The ox is the Messiah who would conduct the final war; according to tradition he would be descended from Joseph, and would be the forerunner of the real Messiah, descended from David the king. The ass is the suffering servant messiah who descending from Joseph will die. They hold to a dual Messiah theology failing to see the Lord Jesus as both. One is a Son of Joseph and the other the Son of David.

The servants of Jacob divide the cattle and move a distance away from him to wait the appearance of Esau and the four hundred soldiers prepared to give them gifts.

NEXT WEEK: JACOB BECOMES ISRAEL AND MEETS ESAU

Please Call or e-mail with any questions or comments.

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