

Genesis 31:36-55 Jacob and Laban Episode III of III



36 Jacob was angry and took Laban to task. “What is my crime?” he asked Laban. “How have I wronged you that you hunt me down? 37 Now that you have searched through all my goods, what have you found that belongs to your household? Put it here in front of your relatives and mine, and let them judge between the two of us.

Jacob was convinced that he was innocent of stealing from Laban. He was so convinced that he asked for any proof of stolen goods to be brought out for both families to see. For both families to act as a third party to witness and judge the confrontation. **Why would he do this at this time and this way?**

38 “I have been with you for twenty years now. Your sheep and goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten rams from your flocks. 39 I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself. And you demanded payment from me for whatever was stolen by day or night. 40 This was my situation: The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night, and sleep fled from my eyes. 41 It was like this for the twenty years I was in your household. I worked for you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flocks, and you changed my wages ten times. 42 If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you.”

Before Laban could open his mouth and respond to Jacob’s demands, Jacob immediately brought forth his case for all to hear. As he had done with his wives (which seemed to work out well), Jacob proceeded to outline all that Laban had done to Jacob over the past twenty years. The deceptions, wage changes, profiteering at Jacob’s expense, etc. Jacob then accused Laban that Laban would have taken everything away from him if God and not intervened the night before in Laban’s dream. **With what we have read and learned of Laban, are these accusations true? What would you expect Laban to do at this point?**

43 Laban answered Jacob, “The women are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks. All you see is mine. Yet what can I do today about these daughters of mine, or about the children they have borne? 44 Come now, let’s make a covenant, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us.”

Jacob’s statements and accusations are unchallenged by Laban. **Does this lead to the assumption that Laban agrees them all to be true? Why would Laban agree to let his family and flocks go with Jacob?**

He knew he had to surrender his daughters, his grandchildren, and all the flocks Jacob had claimed, which he said really belonged to him. Many commentators believe that what Laban really wanted from this confrontation was the family gods/idols. These gods represented title deeds to property and ownership of estates. Rachel probably took them because she believed either she, her husband (Jacob, the adopted son of Laban), or her sons should one day inherit Laban's property. Laban would be concerned that at sometime in the future Jacob could return and stake a claim on what Laban or his family had with the use of the gods as proof of true ownership.

Laban had met his match and was trapped. His best recourse to prevent losing all he had besides what Jacob was presently taking, was to create a barrier to keep Jacob from coming back and taking more in the future. Laban realizes the true nature of what has taken place and proposes to end the feud by making a covenant with Jacob that was to be witnessed by both families.

45 So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. 46 He said to his relatives, "Gather some stones." So they took stones and piled them in a heap, and they ate there by the heap. 47 Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, and Jacob called it Galeed.

Jacob did not respond in words but in action. They immediately made a pillar and a heap of stones. These pillars were a common practice in those times to commemorate important events such as divine manifestations, military victories, formalize a vow, or keep alive the memory of a person.

Jacob had been living and serving with Laban for 20 years. You would assume they spoke the same language during that time. **Why did Laban use Aramaic but Jacob used Hebrew in naming the same place, was it intentional?**

48 Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." That is why it was called Galeed. 49 It was also called Mizpah, because he said, "May the Lord keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other. 50 If you mistreat my daughters or if you take any wives besides my daughters, even though no one is with us, remember that God is a witness between you and me."

51 Laban also said to Jacob, "Here is this heap, and here is this pillar I have set up between you and me. 52 This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not go past this heap to your side to harm you and that you will not go past this heap and pillar to my side to harm me. 53 May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." So Jacob took an oath in the name of the Fear of his father Isaac. 54 He offered a sacrifice there in the hill country and invited his relatives to a meal. After they had eaten, they spent the night there.

Why would Laban choose to put up a pillar and heap as a response to the recent events and ask Jacob to swear to the covenant they made that day?

Why would Jacob agree so quickly? Why did only Jacob take the oath?

The two men, neither of whom trusted each other, said in effect: "I cannot trust you out of my sight. The Lord must be the watchman between us if we and our goods are to be kept safe from each other." Laban was concerned of the loss of the deeds (gods) and not about possible physical harm at this time.

He knew that with those gods, Jacob held the potential for greater harm in the future. Jacob had no problem taking the oath because he just wanted to go home with his new family and flocks and had he no knowledge of the stolen gods.

55 Early the next morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. Then he left and returned home.

And did they all live happily ever after??

With these final goodbyes, it would appear this encounter, which took place openly in front of both families, cleared the air for both Jacob and Laban. Each had a guaranteed respect for the other's families and land. It was as official as these could be at that time. This allowed a night of sleeping in peace and a parting the next morning with the normal kissing and blessing of Laban's daughters and grandchildren. The two men were now blood brothers from the sacrifice and meal, pledged to eternal unity and fidelity.

What can we learn from this episode of "The Days the Patriarch's Lives"?

The will of God in our daily life.



One would think that at some point Jacob would want to go back to his homeland and family. How did the decision come about and how did God's Will proceed? First, Jacob had a desire to go home. Then circumstances arose with Laban that made it difficult to remain. As we have read there was envy, jealousy and injustice to name a few. Lastly, there was a calling, a command from the Lord to go back home.

"Thus inward desire, outward circumstances and the Divine word combined to make the pathway clear. This is ever the way of God's guidance; the conviction of the spirit within, the Word agreeing with it in principle, and the outward circumstances of right guidance. When these three agree, we may be sure of right guidance. When the first two alone are clear, the way may be right, but the time is not yet come. When the third only is clear and the two former are not, we may be certain that the way is not right. "

The acknowledgement of God in daily life

Jacob, Leah, Racheal and Laban, all at some point spoke of the Lord interacting in their lives. Sometimes to intercede for them, sometimes to prevent them from doing something they wanted to accomplish. Even at the end of this chapter of Laban and Jacob's life they acknowledged God's power and presence to complete their covenant with each other.

"It may not be possible always to discern God's hand aright, or to attribute to Him precisely the things that really come from Him, but it is surely one of the prime secrets of true life to be able to acknowledge God's presence and power, and to realize that there is a "Divinity that shapes our ends." ... in spite of any mistakes we may make about God's hand: "In all thy ways acknowledge Him." To do this is to live as He desires us to live."

Proverbs 3:6 (ESV) In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

The Providence of God in daily life

The plan of God was working through the story of Jacob and Laban. Even in the midst of envy, hatred, malice, injustice, deception and lying, God was overruling and working to accomplish His will and His purpose. All these characters had freewill to make choices, some good and some not so good. We have seen the consequences of sinful choices played out in Jacob and Laban's lives in these stories. Even so, God's master plan is still being carried out. Jacob continues to become one of the patriarchs and tries to be obedient to the God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac.

We too are part of God's plan as we live out our story. He has a plan for our lives, and He has a grand plan for all mankind. We have freewill to make good choices or not so good choices. While here on earth we will have consequences of our sinful choices, even though the final penalty of sin has been forgiven and paid by the death of Jesus. But as Proverbs 3:6 states if we acknowledge Him, He will make our paths straight.

"We are often perplexed by the problems of sin and freewill, and we are baffled as we try to think how God's will can possibly be done amid all the perverseness of human nature. But we can learn much from a story like this, as we observe each actor a perfectly free agent and yet see everything taken up into the Divine purpose and made to serve far-reaching ends. We may well speak of God's providence, His "seeing beforehand" and making provision accordingly. It is this that gives quietness amidst perplexities and enables the soul to rest in faith until all is made clear. God's providence is indeed the saints' inheritance."

Recap other from Episodes I and II:

I. Questions for Thought: Just how much to God's care do you trust the things you consider the most important things in your life? Of the priorities in your life, where does God fall on that list?

II. Key points to contemplate from this lesson:

- a) God's hand of governance is always present in the lives of his people, whether we can discern it or not.
- b) God has his plan and it will not be changed.
- c) We always need to be very discerning about our decisions and whether they are within God's plan for our lives; God always cleans up the mess of our decisions, but it is so much nicer to be in harmony with them from the start
- d) We need to recognize that all of our hard work and plans will only be blessed if God desires and then they will succeed in spite of us many times.
- e) We need to continually remember that all we have is from God and nothing of ourselves. God provides and blesses all and we are nothing more than Stewards of His Blessings!

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