

April 15, 2007 (LS)

BETHEL VS. BABEL
GENESIS 31.1-55

1. THE COMMAND TO LEAVE LABAN (1-16)

Taking Laban's glory (1-2): Ref. back to agreement and actions at the close of ch. 30. Laban's sons are given charge over the original speckled and spotted sheep and goats (cf. 30.35). They are in on trying to cheat Jacob. They are the heirs of Laban, and they are being disinherited.

"Wealth" = Heb. word "glory." Jacob is taking the *glory* of Laban (cp. 13.2 and Abraham's spoils from Egypt; same word).

Laban's "face was not toward Jacob as it was in days past." Laban realized earlier that Jacob was the reason he had been blessed (30.27). But now all that he has is being taken away. Jacob is not in good graces with Laban anymore.

Bethel's promise (3): God commands Jacob to leave, going back to the land. God promises to be with him. This is the promise given at Bethel (20 years earlier) being fulfilled.

"Choose you this day" (4-13): Decision for the wives: "Will you stay and worship the gods of your father or will you follow me and my God?" Jacob begins to present the case to them.

1st, Laban's injustice: He has changed his wages "ten times" (might be a saying like our "I've told you 100 times!"). Nevertheless God did not allow Laban to hurt him. Instead, God blessed Jacob. God took Laban's livestock and gave it to Jacob.

2nd, Jacob's dream/vision. (This could be 2 separate dreams at 2 different times; one earlier concerning the sheep & goats and the other to leave. May have all been after-the-fact.)

Remember: "Laban" = "white." The peeling of the sticks was to expose the "white/Laban;" i.e., before God. God saw/heard and ruled in Jacob's favor, giving him the flocks.

"The God of Bethel" He is the God who established his house (Bethel = house of God) with Jacob, promising to make a new creation through Jacob. Promises: Jacob will come back and God will be with him. This is fulfillment time.

Note: return to *his family*. Wasn't Laban family? Cp. 29.14. A complete break with the old family line is occurring here.

Obedient wives (14-16): Choice is not, "Do I want to be with Jacob or do I want to stay with Daddy?" This is a matter of whose God will be followed. This is presented as a command from Jacob's God (who is opposed to the gods of Laban).

Rachel and Leah respond by recognizing the unrighteousness of their father in dealing with them as well as with Jacob. They say that Laban has considered them to be strangers and has sold them, consuming their money.

Reference to *mohar* (bride money) earned by Jacob for them. Laban was to keep this in trust. Obviously he kept it for himself. Because of these things, they recognize God's hand in giving them what was owed to them. They agree to leave.

2. THE DEPARTURE FROM LABAN (17-21)

Jacob and his possessions (17-18): Note all the uses of "his" referring to things. These belong to Jacob, not Laban.

Mocking Laban and his gods (19-20): Related actions: Laban goes to shear his sheep and Rachel steals his household gods (Heb. = *teraphim*. They are images of no particular size. These were obviously of a smaller variety. But they are idols.)

Why would Rachel steal these? Speculations: (1) she is still hanging on to the old religion; (2) she is being superstitious; (3) according to an ancient custom, she is securing the inheritance for her sons. None of these seems to fit.

(4) She is mocking her father and his gods. I believe this is the reason. He leaves the gods to protect his house and they themselves are stolen and later defiled! What power!

Rachel *steals* these *teraphim* and then Jacob lit. "steals the heart of Laban." He is leaving stealthily, not telling Laban. Laban's gods are completely powerless to stop anything.

Note: Laban the Syrian/Aramean. Connected explicitly with Abraham's old family. The children of Israel later will acknowledge their father being a "wandering Aramean" (Deut 26.5). He is of the old family which Abraham had to leave (Babel people). But up until this time the patriarchs have taken their wives from this family, acknowledging some connection to them. Now it is time to break off all of the old connections completely.

Leaving the land of his forefathers (21): The River = Euphrates. This is the border of the Promised Land; cf. Gen 15.18.

The other side of the River = old world/old gods. Cf. Josh 24.2, 15

"Mountains of Gilead." Inasmuch as mountains are places where you meet with God, Jacob is moving back to that mountain of God in order to worship the true God where he has promised him he would be.

3. THE PURSUIT OF LABAN (22-24)

Chasing Jacob to the mountain (22-23): 3rd day / 7th day; initial deliverance / final deliverance.

Cp. Num 19 and the ritual baptism. A defiled person (ritually dead) is washed 2x, 3rd day and 7th day. Rooted in creation: land and life initially emerge on 3rd day, completed on 7th day. (Note also Jesus resurrection and our resurrection.)

God's warning to Laban (24): Laban on the mountain meets with God on the 7th day. (On the 7th day God comes to judge, separating the righteous from the wicked, delivering the righteous and condemning the wicked.)

Speak no "good or evil." Judgment language. Laban better not pass judgment on Jacob. Laban may not act as a judge.

4. THE CONFRONTATION WITH LABAN (25-43)

Accusing the righteous (25-28): Note the division of brothers. Laban has "his brothers." Families are separated.

Ploy of the serpent: accuse the righteous, setting himself up as righteous.

Who has treated *his daughters* poorly? It is Laban himself, not Jacob.

Threatening the righteous (29): Still wants to exert his power over Jacob (and would had not God threatened him). Unrighteous people are always revealed as unrighteous when they are confronted with their sin and their response is accusing and/or threatening others rather than humble repentance.

Open for examination (30-32): Jacob knew that Laban would have taken Jacob's things by force.

Humiliation of the false gods (33-35): (1) Laban must search for his gods; (2) a woman has stolen and is sitting on them; (3) "the way of a woman = menstruation; she is defiling them (cf. Lev 15.19ff.)

Jacob's righteousness vindicated (36-42): Jacob calls Laban into court. Presents the case of injustices.

- Jacob absorbed the losses of Laban's flock; cp. Ex 22.10-13
- Laban required restitution of losses no matter the circumstances; cp. again Ex 22.10-13
- After six years it was time to go free, and Laban should have provided for him willingly; cf. Ex 21.1ff.; Dt 15.12-15

Laban's unlawful claim (43): Laban claims all these things are *his*. This indicates he understood Jacob to be a slave (cf. Ex 21).

5. THE COVENANT WITH LABAN (44-54)

Laban's initiation (44):

Jacob's mediation (45-46): Jacob sets up the pillar and his brother gather stones.

Naming the heap (47-50): "heap of witness" and "watchtower;" more negative than positive

A covenant of non-aggression (51-54):

6. THE SEPARATION FROM LABAN (55)

"Early in the morning" - the beginning of a new era.

(1) There is one true God and all other gods are lifeless idols.

(2) God hears the cries and sees the affliction of his people. He will act in due time to deliver.