

The Lord Protected Jacob from Laban

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain and help others understand why it is important for them to continue to grow in their understanding of the Lord. This is a key for individuals to become healthy Christians who are able to help others. In this topic, we will see that the Lord protected Jacob from Laban when Laban followed Jacob as he fled from Haran.

Jacob had talked with Leah and Rachel and they were in agreement with him that they should leave Laban and his sons and return to the land from which Jacob had come. Genesis 31:17-21 says, “Then Jacob rose and set his sons and his wives on camels. 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. Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel had stolen the household idols that were her father’s. And Jacob stole away, unknown to Laban the Syrian, in that he did not tell him that he intended to flee. So he fled with all that he had. He arose and crossed the river, and headed toward the mountains of Gilead.” Here, we see how the family of Jacob traveled as they began their trip to the land of Canaan. We read that Jacob provided camels for his wives and sons to ride as they traveled. This was the common form of travel in that area throughout most of history.

Since Jacob was not going to return to the city of Haran, it was necessary for Jacob, and his family, to take everything with them. This included all of the sheep, cattle and other animals Jacob had gained during the twenty years Jacob had lived in Haran. The Lord had greatly blessed Jacob in spite of the fact that Laban had changed his wages ten times in order to try to cheat Jacob out of the things the Lord chose to provide for Jacob. Jacob and his family left the area of Padan Aram and began their return to the land of Canaan where Isaac, the father of Jacob, still lived. At the time Jacob left, Laban had gone to shear the wool from his sheep. This meant that it was during the spring months, as that was the normal time to shear the wool of the sheep.

However, Rachel had done something Jacob did not know about. She had stolen the household idols that belonged to her father. We saw in the last topic that both Rachel and Leah were learning to follow the Lord. However, we see here that Rachel had not yet turned from the family idols. When people have grown up worshiping idols, it is important to help them turn from idols as well as turn to the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 1:9 says, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God...” This verse shows us that people, who make a true decision to follow the Lord, are shown by God the importance of turning from idols as well as turning to God. This would come in the life of Rachel, but it had not happened yet in her life.

Jacob left Haran while Laban was away shearing the sheep because he did not want Laban to know that he intended to flee. Jacob and his family took everything they possessed because this was a permanent departure from the city of Haran. Haran was located near the Euphrates River so they had to cross that river soon after they fled from Haran. Once they were across that river, they traveled toward the mountains of Gilead which were located east of the land of Canaan.

Genesis 31:22-25 says, “And Laban was told on the third day that Jacob had fled. Then he took his brethren with him and pursued him for seven days’ journey, and he overtook him in the mountains of Gilead. 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.’ So Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mountains, and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mountains of Gilead.” We see that it took Laban a period of time to catch up with Jacob.

Laban did not find out for three days that Jacob had fled from Haran. Once Laban heard that Jacob had fled, Laban talked to his brothers and extended family and got them to go with him as he went after Jacob and his family. The fact that Laban took his brothers along with him shows that Laban had a sinful purpose for this trip. Jacob had feared that Laban might come after him. Even with his family, flocks and all of his possessions, Jacob and the entire family had traveled very quickly so that they could escape from Laban. As a result, it took Laban seven days to catch up with Jacob. The fact that Jacob had already reached the mountains of Gilead shows that they had traveled quite a distance during those days.

However, the Lord was the One who stopped Laban from doing anything evil to Jacob and his family. God gave Laban a dream during the night while he was sleeping. In that dream, the Lord warned Laban not to speak to Jacob anything good or bad. By this warning, the Lord made it clear to Laban that he was not to say or do anything evil to Jacob or any of those who were with Jacob. This warning from the Lord again made it clear that Laban had a sinful purpose for this trip. Since the Lord warned Laban and he did not put his sinful plan into action, we do not know what Laban may have tried to do if the Lord had not stopped him. However, we do see that the Lord protected Jacob from Laban. God had earlier protected Abraham from harm by other men. Genesis 12:17 says, “But the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife.” Then, in Genesis 20:3, God gave Abimelech a dream to protect Abraham again. Genesis 20:3 says, “But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, ‘Indeed you *are* a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she *is* a man’s wife.’” Here, God protected Jacob in the same way.

Jacob had pitched his tent (had stopped for the night) in the mountains of Gilead. This was the place where Laban finally caught up with Jacob and his family. God had warned Laban not to say or do anything to Jacob. Laban had to give a reason why he had pursued Jacob when he caught up with him in the mountains of Gilead. As a result, Genesis 31:26-29 says, “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? 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? And you did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters. Now you have done foolishly in *so* doing. 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 see that Laban gave his excuse for following Jacob.

Laban began his excuse by asking Jacob why he had left without letting Laban know that he was leaving. He said that Jacob had taken away his daughters like captives taken away with a sword. He did not know that Jacob had talked with Leah and Rachel and that they had both agreed with Jacob that they needed to leave. Laban gave no thought to the way he had treated his daughters. Genesis 31:14-15 says, “Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, ‘Is there still any

portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? Are we not considered strangers by him? For he has sold us, and also completely consumed our money.” From these words of his daughters, we see that they felt like their father had mistreated them because he did not give them any inheritance. He had treated them like strangers. He had sold them to Jacob for fourteen years of work and then had not shared anything with them, even though the Lord had blessed Laban greatly during those fourteen years. Laban had no idea they felt rejected by what he had done because he was only thinking of himself.

Laban then said that instead of leaving secretly, Jacob should have let him send his daughters away with a large farewell party. He said that he would have sent Jacob and his family away with feasting and music before they left. Laban said that Jacob did not even allow him to kiss his sons (grandsons) and daughters before they left. Laban went on to accuse Jacob of doing something very foolish by leaving without telling Laban that he was returning to the land of his fathers. Here, we see that Laban tried to hide the fact that he had planned to commit sin against Jacob. However, he went on to say something else that really showed the intent of his heart.

Laban said that it was in his power to do harm to Jacob. The fact that Laban said those words showed that he had been planning to do something. Then, he explained what God had said to him in a dream the previous night. Laban said, “...the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, “Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.”” Laban was so busy thinking about his own plans, it did not enter his thinking that by telling what God had said, he was actually showing that his plan was to do evil to Jacob. First, Laban called God “...the God of your father...” By this statement, Laban made it clear that he did not believe and have his trust in that God. In fact, we will see in the next topic that Laban was really upset about losing his idols because they were the gods on which he depended rather than the True and Living God.

Second, he said that God told him in his dream to “be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.” Since God knows the thoughts of our hearts (which Laban did not understand), Laban said that God had told him not to speak anything to Jacob - good or bad. What that statement actually points out is the fact that because God does know the thoughts of the hearts that God had warned Laban not to do what he planned to do. This is one of the things that most people who do not believe in God do not know or understand - that God knows the thoughts of their hearts. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain that God looks on our hearts and knows what we are thinking. He knows the thoughts and intents of every person. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things.