

Jacob had become aware that he was wearing out his welcome in Laban's household. Laban had put him under contract shortly after he arrived in Haran, a refugee from his father's tent in Canaan. While he was separated by distance from Esau's threat of revenge, he was now finding it necessary to depart from Haran. Laban's sons were becoming aware of Jacob's diligence in tending Laban's flocks and observed his success in multiplying the portion of the flock that he had bargained with Laban to be his wages. Here God stepped in and spoke to Jacob. Was this the first time Jacob had contact with God in twenty years? He had seen the ladder to heaven as he slept in Bethel and heard the promise from God to keep him and bring him back safely. At that time, while accepting the promise, he had countered with a vow that God would be his God if God performed what He promised. God kept His promise but Jacob, meanwhile, had neglected to become involved personally with this powerful, blessing God who yearns for fellowship with men. While he had faithfully served Laban, it had not been a easy relationship between these two covetous men, nor with the women (Laban's daughters) that Laban had sold him as wives. We learn here that they resented their father selling them to Jacob for seven years service each. They felt no loyalty to a father that would accept and enforce such a bargain. Yet it had been Jacob's idea to make the bargain at first. But Laban was not a generous, loving father and grandfather though he portrayed himself as such when he caught up to Jacob in Gilead.

But God intervened, again apparently unasked, and told Jacob to return to the land of his fathers, promising to be with him. That may have reminded Jacob how God had been with him the past twenty years but we hear no grateful thanksgiving to God. (Are we thankful? Every day?) But Jacob did acknowledge and recount God's role in protecting him and His being with him, though it apparently had been in more of a providential way than personally in daily communion. And Jacob credited God for the spectacular increase of the flock he had bargained with Laban to be his wages. God in a dream had explained that He was the reason Jacob's flock flourished and that He had been watching over Jacob and blessing him. God also reminded Jacob of the vow he had made at Bethel. Clearly He was holding him to it though He had not requested it at first. Originally He had given promises of His presence and blessing and safe return, no strings attached. But when Jacob took a vow He held him to it. Do we bargain with God sometimes? Do we make promises to God to do, or not to do, things? We need to purpose in our hearts as Daniel did before God, but daily rely upon God's power through the Holy Spirit. We are to walk as He desires rather than take matters into our own hands as Jacob did over and over again. Jacob had vowed that God would be his God if God did what He promised. Yes, God had graciously fulfilled His side of the deal imposed by Jacob's vow. Now He was going to claim that promise, graciously overlooking the put-off Jacob's vow had really

been. Return to Him now! He is waiting.

Jacob gathered all that was his and left while Laban was away. Laban, self righteously, pursued Jacob and his family and flocks. But God intervened and came to Laban in a dream commanding him be neutral toward Jacob. Still he had a difficult time not harming Jacob or looting his camp. But we can see the real reason he pursued Jacob, His household gods were missing and he wanted them back.. Some gods! They couldn't even prevent themselves from being kidnaped. Notice the way he and his relatives freely use the name of God when it is useful to them. Jacob's references to God are interesting. He did not say "my God" but said "the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac." Laban took an even more distant position saying, "The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father." We learn from Joshua 24:14 their fathers were idolaters. Beware of those who use the name of God in their pious conversations but show no indication of His reality in their lives.

2Timothy 3:5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

But there is some evidence the idols had more than a religious significance to Laban.

"This incident has long been a puzzle. Why was Laban so greatly concerned about recovering these images which Rachel had stolen (v. 19)? Attempting to recapture them he conducted a long and expensive expedition.

"Excavations at Nuzi in northern Mesopotamia, in the region in which Laban lived, show that the possession of the household gods of a father-in-law by a son-in-law was legally acceptable as proof of the designation of that son-in-law as principal heir. This not only explains the story but also proves that it was written at a time when the facts were so well-known that no explanation was needed. It is no wonder that Jacob was very angry that he should be accused of such a deed (v. 36), and that the two men set up a boundary and promised not to cross it to injure one another (vv. 45-52). **Jacob never made evil use** of these images which Rachel had stolen, but ordered that they should be buried at Shechem (Gen. 35:2-4)." Note from the Scofield Bible.

The pillar they erected marked an agreed upon boundary between them, a sort of non aggression pact between two covetous and distrustful men who despised each other. Gilead later became a possession of the two and one half tribes of Israel who chose to remain on the east side of the Jordan River outside of the promised land. Later history recorded in the scriptures witnesses the Syrians crossing the boundary to invade Israel more than once. On the other hand Solomon extended his boundary northeastward well beyond Gilead. Currently the area is subject to a boundary dispute between Israel and Syria. Israel retains the Golan heights overlooking their land to prevent giving Syria a platform for artillery bombardment. The prophets describe yet future events across that line.

By Ronald Canner, October 27, 2010