

The Get Away 10-7-07

Genesis 31:17-55

Our passage today begins with Jacob and his wives making their get away from Laban's home. God had told Jacob it was time to return to the Promised Land. His time of servitude to Laban was over. Remember, Jacob's mother was supposed to send word when Esau's anger subsided, but apparently she died before that happened. (Genesis 27:45) Jacob had no way of knowing that, but getting away from his uncle was a great relief. Jacob was probably thrilled to hear the Lord's instruction to leave, but at the same time, he worried about what Laban and Esau would do. It was a fear we can relate too, but one that disregarded the promises of God. God's direction often challenges us to have faith and believe.

Commented [notes1]: 45 When your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him, I'll send word for you to come back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?"

When he asked his wives if they were willing to go, they gave an answer that gives us a clue to the culture of that day. ¹⁴ Then Rachel and Leah replied, "Do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father's estate?" ¹⁵ Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us, but he has used up what was paid for us. They were the firstborn, and it was after their marriage that Laban had sons. If Laban followed the traditions of the land, he probably adopted Jacob and made him his heir. That may be what was implied in 29:14, "You are my own flesh and blood." But now that he has sons, the will has probably been changed. That prompted Rachel and Leah to declare it wasn't likely that they had any share in their Father's estate.

They also said that he had used up the bride-price. The bride-price was to be held by the father in case the groom died. It was like life insurance on the groom with the bride as beneficiary. These brides are declaring that their father lost it all, or you could say he used up the life insurance money, so why stay? Laban's greed separated him from his family. (Proverbs 15:27) Greed destroys homes and relationships. It is so sad to watch siblings quarrel over an estate and end up never speaking to each other again. This whole family seems to be fixated on money. Some things never change.

Commented [notes2]: 27 A greedy man brings trouble to his family, but he who hates bribes will live.

Jacob waited for the opportune moment to make the break. He hadn't yet come to fully trust God. Even though God said he would bring him back safely to the Promised Land, (Genesis 28:15) Jacob again felt he had to help God out. He waited until Laban was away sheering his flocks. Remember, six years earlier, Laban had taken the spotted and speckled sheep to another place to reduce Jacob's chances of breeding sheep that would become his wages. (Genesis 30:35) The distance separating them seemed like the perfect opportunity to get a head start.

Commented [notes3]: 15 I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

Commented [notes4]: 35 That same day he removed all the male goats that were streaked or spotted, and all the speckled or spotted female goats (all that had white on them) and all the dark-colored lambs, and he placed them in the care of his sons.

¹⁹ When Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father's household gods. These gods are little miniature doll like shapes. Laban probably inherited these from one of his forefathers. Was Rachel an idolater? Not necessarily. The possession of these idols could be used as proof that you were the heir of your father's estate. The girls felt they had been cheated. Their tight fisted father would not send them off with gifts, nor did he have the insurance money for their husband. Their husband

was supposed to be the heir, until he had sons (probably from taking another wife who was not their mother).

You have more than likely seen this today in our culture. With all of our divorce and remarriage, the dividing of the estate after a death can be a battle royal. One side of the family pits itself against the other. Rachel tried to assure the eventual inheritance of the father's estate by stealing the idols. Even if they never returned, the precious metal in the idols would be a recovery of some of their loss. Is anyone in the story trusting God? I'm afraid not. Are we trusting God? (Numbers 20:12)

²⁰ Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him he was running away. We would probably not call this act of leaving without telling the father-in-law "deception", but the author did. The word in Hebrew recalls Rachel's theft of the idols. It is literally to steal the heart. If someone has a reasonable expectation of you, and you don't live up to what is normal and expected, you have deceived him or her. (Leviticus 19:11) Jacob said later that he did it because of fear; fear that Laban would take his wives away. Again, where is his trust in God? Did God not say He would make his descendants into a great multitude? (Genesis 28:14)

Every fear that we have can be addressed by the word of God! There is reason to trust God in every situation in life. (Isaiah 26:4) God's word is just as real to us as it was to Jacob. You might think we should expect more of Jacob because he had a dream of the Lord. We have the Scriptures and the promises of the Lord Jesus who rose from the dead to give you confidence that He can do what He promises. (Romans 4:21) I think if Jacob could stand before us he would say that we have more reason to trust and not fear than he did. (Psalm 62:8)

Fear of anything other than God usually results in some kind of sin. (Exodus 20:20) In this case it was deception. It is usually a lie of some kind, or an action that declares we trust our self more than we trust God. Jacob's deception is going to cause some very hard feelings and endanger the life of the one he loves most dearly.

Laban felt he had a just cause, so he rounded up the relatives and set out to make things right. Without the flocks he could travel twice as fast so within seven days he caught up with them. The night before he confronted Jacob, he had a dream. ²⁴ Then God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream at night and said to him, "Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad." God forbade Laban from doing or saying anything to Jacob either to bless the deception or to rebuke him. God was keeping his promise to Jacob. He knows how to deliver us from the dilemmas we get ourselves into. He could have let Laban deal him a severe blow for not trusting in God, but that would be contrary to the lesson God is trying to teach Jacob. The lesson is to trust in the word of the Lord, and to let that trust cast out our fears. Act with integrity and uprightness when we obey God, and He will deliver us. (Psalm 34:17) Having all the relatives with him, Laban could have killed Jacob and taken everything back to Paddan Aram, but God was keeping His promises and wouldn't let that happen.

Commented [notes5]: 12 But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."

Commented [notes6]: 11 "Do not steal. "Do not lie. "Do not deceive one another.

Commented [notes7]: 14 Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.

Commented [notes8]: 4 Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.

Commented [notes9]: 21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

Commented [notes10]: 8 Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. Selah

Commented [notes11]: 20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

Commented [notes12]: 17 The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.

Just as Jacob fled the wrath of his brother, he is now fleeing for his life from Laban. This guy sure knows how to make enemies. But God has chosen him and is working in his life to transform him, by teaching him to have faith in God's faithfulness to keep His word. He is doing the same in your life and mine. (2Corinthians 7:1)

Commented [notes13]: 1 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Now we have the confrontation of perspectives. It has always amazed me to see how two different people can see the same thing and yet tell such a different story of what they saw. Many of our own conflicts arise out of being unable to see the other person's perspective and relating to it. (Proverbs 21:2)

Commented [notes14]: 2 All a man's ways seem right to him, but the LORD weighs the heart.

26 Then Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You've deceived me, and you've carried off my daughters like captives in war. 27 Why did you run off secretly and deceive me? Why didn't you tell me, so I could send you away with joy and singing to the music of tambourines and harps? 28 You didn't even let me kiss my grandchildren and my daughters good-by. You have done a foolish thing. I thought he wasn't supposed to say anything good or bad. I guess he just couldn't help himself. And what about that line, "You deceived me!" Didn't Jacob say the same thing to Laban the morning after the wedding night? (Genesis 19:25) Here we are again with the sowing and reaping lesson.

Commented [notes15]: 25 When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?"

Laban suggests he would have thrown a great party. Maybe, if he could find a way for Jacob to foot the bill. Then there is the appeal to the emotions, not getting to kiss his daughters and grandbabies goodbye. Hmmm? Makes me wonder if he ever talked this much about his love for his daughters and grandchildren. Then he relayed the warning dream he had. He ended his pity party with an accusation, "Why did you steal my gods?" If those idols were found in Jacob's camp, it would have been verification to the family that he was trying to take Laban's wealth. This would have made Laban seem like the good guy, and Jacob like an evil foreigner who had come to rob the family.

Jacob knew nothing about Rachel's theft of the gods. *31 Jacob answered Laban, "I was afraid, because I thought you would take your daughters away from me by force. 32 But if you find anyone who has your gods, he shall not live. In the presence of our relatives, see for yourself whether there is anything of yours here with me; and if so, take it."* He admitted it was fear of Laban taking his daughters back, which is really an accusation against Laban's character, a well deserved one. These verse show us that Jacob was not a participant in Rachel's theft of the idols.

Laban began a search through the tents ending with Rachel's tent. *34 Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them inside her camel's saddle and was sitting on them. Laban searched through everything in the tent but found nothing. 35 Rachel said to her father, "Don't be angry, my lord, that I cannot stand up in your presence; I'm having my period." So he searched but could not find the household gods.* She is as cunning as her aunt Rebecca. Deception could be the family's middle name. There is a bit of Jewish humor in the situation. Camels are unclean to the Jews. Menstrual issue is also considered unclean along with anything it touches. While Jacob's God is all powerful in bringing him home to the Promised Land, the gods of Laban lay doubly defiled and completely unable to help Laban.

With the idols undiscovered, it was Jacob's turn to give his perspective. In front of all the relatives Jacob declared, and I paraphrase, "So you accuse me of being a thief. If you found anything of yours in my camp, show it to our relatives so they can judge between us! You hunted me down like a criminal."

Then he gives his sob story. Listen to the violins moaning in the background. 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.* Boo hoo! He didn't mention that he was walking away with most of what once belonged to Laban or his little breeding scheme. (Proverbs 1:31)

Commented [notes16]: 31 they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.

When we start arguing like this, it's almost impossible to see the other person's side of the story, to walk in his or her shoes. All we see is the hardship we have endured. This rant seems so well worded, it makes me think he had practiced it if not even said it to his wives and sons. It poisoned his heart with bitterness and now was his chance to spill it out in front of all the relatives. (Hebrews 12:15) Surely they were all well aware of Laban's greed and attempted use of Jacob. Jacob is winning the argument even though his beloved wife is guilty of stealing the idols, and he is guilty of a lack of faith in God.

Commented [notes17]: 15 See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

Then Jacob delivered a stinging accusation. 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.*" By Laban's own confession, he was not harming Jacob because of the dream from God. Jacob uses that point to tell all in earshot that Laban would have sent him away with nothing to show for 20 years of labor if he wasn't afraid of the wrath of God.

Laban's turn to spin it back his way: 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?"* He was saying, "Everything you have come from me! Why are you complaining? I'm losing my daughters and grandkids!" I ask you, whose side are you on? In these ugly battles, we shouldn't be on either side. (Joshua 6:13-14) Yes, God was with Jacob, but Jacob was wrong not to trust God and tell Laban they were leaving. They are both masters at manipulation. I doubt we'd want to be a friend of either of these characters. This ugly confrontation is the consequence of Jacob's decision to try to get away fast without telling Laban.

Commented [notes18]: 13 Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"
14 "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"

Whenever you are in doubt about what to do, do what you know in your heart is the right thing, even if you are afraid. Sometimes people come for counsel and ask what they should do. I often answer, "What do you think God would have you do?" They

usually end up answering their own question. They were just looking for a way out and hoping they could blame someone else if it didn't work. Jacob thought he was avoiding a confrontation. He only created a worse one! The easy way out often turns out to be not so easy. Do what you know is right in the eyes of God and trust God for the outcome. (Proverbs 14:34)

Commented [notes19]: 34 Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.

They made a feast and ate together, notice it was at Jacob's expense. It is significant that they ate bread, as salted bread was a covenant of peace. (Leviticus 2:13) I'm not sure if the tradition began this early, but the mention of the bread seems significant. They formed a pile of stones and set up a standing stone as memorials to their agreement and promised to not pass from one side to the other to do harm. In other words, you stay in your space and I'll stay in mine. They were so tired of each other that they just wanted their own space. Laban also wanted to be sure Jacob took no other wives. He wanted the wealth that was once his to end up with his daughters. That wasn't a problem. By now, Jacob knows four are more than enough. (Deuteronomy 17:17)

Commented [notes20]: 13 Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings.

Laban made an oath by the gods of their fathers. The only problem was that the gods of Terah, their great-grandfather, were idols. Jacob made his oath in the name of the Fear of Isaac, or we could say the God that Isaac revered. He knew there was a difference. He has seen the grace of that God intervene in his life again and again. Even in this meeting he has had the renewed sense that God was still keeping His word and bringing him back safely as He had promised. That is why he offered a sacrifice and invited the family to the meal. It was an act of worshipful gratitude.

Commented [notes21]: 17 He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.

⁵⁵ *Early the next morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. Then he left and returned home.* That is the end of Laban's story. He slipped quietly off into history, a man known for his greed and selfishness. Isaac is about to have another encounter with God, and his transformation will continue. These two men were very similar, almost mirror images, but there was a great difference. Jacob was willing to learn from his encounters with God. Laban went on with his idolatry in spite of the undeniable presence of God in his encounters with Jacob. Jacob will continue to change after every encounter. Each of us will go the route of Laban or that of Jacob. God encounters us through His word, through others, even quietly within our heart. (Psalm 4:4) Will we cling to our other gods of money and self-satisfaction, or will we continue to let our encounters with God transform us? Will we increasingly have faith to act on the promises of God instead of our fears?

Commented [notes22]: 4 In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Selah

I can look back at Jacob's life and see his lack of faith, but can I see when I am acting just like him? Will we depend on our own cunning or the blessing of God? What God has planned for us is so much more than we could ever bring about by our own abilities. I don't want to get in His way. What would Jacob's life have been like had he trusted God's promises to Him? What would ours be like?