

Genesis 31:22-55 and 32:1-32

Even though Laban had changed his bargain 10 times, God made sure that Jacob came out on top every time.

Genesis 30:43 **"And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses."**

Under the new contract, he was making up for lost time, but Laban didn't see it that way, and finally his evident animosity put an end to Jacob's headlong pursuit of wealth.

Yes, in spite of the fact that he had been honourable in all his dealings, Laban and his sons had convinced themselves that Jacob was cheating them.

Genesis 31:1-2 **"And he heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's; and of that which was our father's hath he gotten all this glory.**

2: And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before."

As far as Jacob was concerned, this was a disaster, but actually it was only one of those **"all things"** that **"work together for good to them that love God."**

Yes, Laban meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.

Through Laban's ill will, God had interrupted Jacob's pursuit of material wealth, and once again focussed his heart on home.

V 3 "And the LORD said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee."

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Years ago, his mother had told him to tarry with Laban "-- a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away;
45: Until thy brother's anger turn away from thee, and he forget that which thou hast done to him: then I will send, and fetch thee from thence." But as far as we know, he never heard from her.

Consequently, Jacob didn't know whether it was safe to go home or not.

But now the silence had been broken.

Jacob had received official word from God Himself that it was OK, indeed,

necessary that he should return to Canaan.

And not only did God *command* Jacob to go, He also assured him that He would be with him.

V 17-19 **"Then Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives upon camels;
18: And he carried away all his cattle, and all his goods which he had gotten, the cattle of his getting, which he had gotten in Padan-aram, for to go to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan.
19: And Laban went to shear his sheep: and Rachel had stolen the images that were her father's."**

That's about where we left Jacob in our last lesson.

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Returning from the shearing of his flock, which, by the way, had grown quite small of late, Laban discovered that Jacob had left, taking everyone and everything with him.

And to make matters worse, Laban's household gods, whom he depended on for his prosperity, were missing also.

So, in a fit of rage, and with murder in his eyes, Laban determined to hunt Jacob down.

V 23 **"And he took his brethren with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey; and they overtook him in the mount Gilead."**

Across the Euphrates and down into the land of Canaan, Laban had kept up a furious pace, and having travelled about 300

miles, he sighted Jacob's camp in the distance.

Travelling as fast as he could, Jacob had taken 10 days to cover the same distance, while Laban had caught up to him in just 7.

It must have been late in the day when Laban discovered Jacob's camp, so he decided to wait until morning to attack.

V 24 **"And God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said unto him, Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad."**

This was Laban's first encounter with Jacob's God, and it was not a friendly one.

As angry as he was, Laban had enough sense to realize that his household gods were no match for Jacob's God.

Yes, he was afraid to attack, but he was not about to leave before he had told Jacob exactly what he thought of him.

He could not fight him, but he would do his best to disgrace him before his brethren.

V 25-28 **"Then Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mount: and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mount of Gilead.**

26: And Laban said to Jacob, What hast thou done, that thou hast stolen away unawares to me, and carried away my daughters, as captives taken with the sword?

27: Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly, and steal away from me; and didst not tell me, that I might have sent thee away with mirth, and with

songs, with tabret, and with harp?

28: And hast not suffered me to kiss my sons and my daughters? thou hast now done foolishly in so doing."

Having been stripped of his military superiority, Laban resorted to deception and hypocrisy.

Of course everything he said was a lie, but Laban could be very convincing.

He was like those spoken of in Isaiah who said, **"We have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves."**

And then the truth finally came out.

V 29-30 **"It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt: but the God of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad.**

**30: And now, though thou wouldest needs
be gone, because thou sore longedst
after thy father's house, yet wherefore
hast thou stolen my gods?"**

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James 1:8 says, "**A double minded man is
unstable in all his ways,**" and
certainly this describes Laban.

He had just admitted that he was powerless
before the true and living God, and yet
he still refers to his wretched little
clay idols as *his "gods."*

How pathetic!

They were gods that could be stolen and
hidden away like so many pots and pans.
They were supposed to have the power to
control the wind and the weather, but
they could not even cry out to Laban,
"Here we are!"

Such ignorance in the heart of an intelligent man is hard to fathom, yet, in our own day, learned professors confidently tell us that creation, with all the intricacies of its DNA makeup, just happened by chance with no creative hand being involved.

Again, I say, how pathetic!

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V 31-35 **"And Jacob answered and said to Laban, Because I was afraid: for I said, Peradventure thou wouldest take by force thy daughters from me.**
32: With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, let him not live: before our brethren discern thou what is thine with me, and take it to thee. For Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them.
33: And Laban went into Jacob's tent,

and into Leah's tent, and into the two maidservants' tents; but he found them not. Then went he out of Leah's tent, and entered into Rachel's tent.

34: Now Rachel had taken the images, and put them in the camel's furniture, and sat upon them. And Laban searched all the tent, but found them not.

35: And she said to her father, Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise up before thee; for the custom of women is upon me. And he searched, but found not the images."

Apparently Rachel had learned more than idol worship from her dad.

If the occasion called for it, she could be as deceptive as her father.

So, being unable to find his images, Laban finally had to admit defeat.

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And now it was Jacob's turn.

Insulted by his uncle, and with his camp in a mess, and his children crying, Jacob let him have both barrels.

V 36-42 **"And Jacob was wroth, and chode with Laban: and Jacob answered and said to Laban, What is my trespass? what is my sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after me?**

37: Whereas thou hast searched all my stuff, what hast thou found of all thy household stuff? set it here before my brethren and thy brethren, that they may judge betwixt us both.

38: This twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten.

39: That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night.

40: Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes.

41: Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times.

42: Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight."

And it was all true.

Jacob had served his uncle well, and owed him absolutely nothing, yet he had been pursued like a criminal.

Did Laban get the point?

No, he didn't!

Controlled by his own covetousness and bitterness, he was beyond all reason.

V 43-44 **"And Laban answered and said unto Jacob, These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and these cattle are my cattle, and all that thou seest is mine: and what can I do this day unto these my daughters, or unto their children which they have born?**

44: Now therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee."

This was no covenant of love, but a drawing of the line.

You stay on that side and I'll stay on this side--and that was fine with Jacob.

Yes, they were both happy to see the last of each other.

V 45-47 **"And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar.**

46: And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones; and they took stones, and made an heap: and they did eat there upon the heap.

47: And Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha: but Jacob called it Galeed."

These are the Aramaic and Hebrew forms of the same words, "The heap of witness." And yet this pile of stones meant something completely different to each man.

To Laban, it was a boundary and an ultimatum.

V 48-53 "And Laban said, This heap is a witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed;

49: And Mizpah; for he said, The LORD watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.

50: If thou shalt afflict my daughters, or if thou shalt take other wives beside my daughters, no man is with us; see, God is witness betwixt me and thee.

51: And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold this pillar, which I have cast betwixt me and thee;

52: This heap be witness, and this pillar be witness, that I will not pass

over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm.

53: The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob sware by the fear of his father Isaac."

In addition to its other name, Laban called this pillar "**Mizpah,**" which means "watchtower."

I don't think his meaning was too friendly, for the name "watchtower" probably indicated that this pillar would be a sentry, guarding the boundary.

Nor were Laban's words in V 49 very friendly either.

"The LORD watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another."

These words are sometimes used at the end of a Christian service as a loving benediction, but that was not their original intent.

They were spoken by a very angry man as a warning, and the real meaning is something like this---*I'll not be around anymore, but I'm asking the Lord to keep an eye on you, and make sure you treat my daughters properly, and, also, don't marry other women.*

That was the gist of his sentiment, and it was a complete insult.

Jacob had never wanted anyone but Rachel.

It was Laban's schemes, not Jacob's desire for other women, which had led him into polygamy.

And when, in V 52, Laban said, **"This heap be witness, and this pillar be witness,**

that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm," it was meant as a further accusation.

Just the day before, he had fully intended to harm Jacob. And now he accuses his son-in-law of the same treachery.

What a hypocrite!

And all this in spite of the fact that Jacob had always treated him honourably, and Laban couldn't deny it: **"This twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten."**

However, in spite of Jacob's exemplary record, Laban had pursued him like a

thief, and had insulted him before his brethren.

And to cap it all off, he now draws a line between them, supposedly to protect himself from this very dangerous man. Yes, this pillar was definitely intended as a reproach upon Jacob's character.

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But Jacob didn't dwell on his uncle's reproaches, but instead looked upon this pillar as a blessing from the Lord.

V 54-55 **"Then Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mount.**
55: And early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his

daughters, and blessed them: and Laban departed, and returned unto his place."

Instead of becoming bitter, Jacob regarded this pile of stones as a *new start*.

He entered the Promised Land with a renewed desire to follow his God, while Laban went back to his pagan darkness to nurse his grudge.

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Actually, the only sensible thing Laban had done was to take God's warning seriously, and it was a good thing for him that he had.

Jacob's company of wives and children and domestic servants must have looked very vulnerable, but there was a second company surrounding them that neither of them could see.

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As we begin Chapter 32, Jacob, and, indeed, we ourselves, have a surprise in store.

Genesis 32:1-2 **"And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.**

2: And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim."

"Mahanaim" means two companies, and it was in this second company that Jacob's real security lay.

Had Laban attacked him, it would have been his *last* mistake.

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Speaking of God's angels, Hebrews 1:14 says,

"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

Usually God's people are unaware of this angelic presence and protection, but

sometimes, as in Jacob's case, they do become visible.

John Wesley spent fifty-two years in the saddle, riding through muck and mire, confronting dangers at every turn as he preached revival to his generation.

In those days, highways were dangerous places for a loan man.

Stagecoaches travelled with armed guards, for highway men lurked in the hedgerows, and footpads hid behind trees, waiting a chance to shoot down the unwary wayfarer.

Gallows were a common sight, set up on the highways as a grim reminder to holdup men that they would be hung if caught, tarred, and left to rot as a warning by the way.

John Wesley was riding one day along a lonely stretch of road when he noticed shadowy forms ahead, forms that vanished behind a hedge almost as his eye took them in.

He could not turn back. That was not his way, yet to go on meant danger and possibly death.

There was no hope of human help on that deserted road, so John Wesley prayed.

Almost at once he heard hoof beats coming up behind him, and he turned in his saddle as another traveller rode up alongside.

Wesley gave the newcomer a cheery greeting, then silently, the two spurred on down the path, on past the place where the robbers lay concealed.

Seeing two men instead of one, the robbers let them pass.

Wesley then turned to say something to his companion, only to discover that there was nobody there!

The mysterious rider had vanished into thin air!

John Wesley had received an unusual glimpse of his *angel escort* along the way.

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So Jacob named the place where he had seen **"the angels of God"**, "two companies," and no doubt remembered God's words-- **"Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee."**

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V 3-6 **"And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom.**

4: And he commanded them, saying, Thus

shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now:

5: And I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight.

6: And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him."

Apparently, having forgotten all about God's angelic host and their ability to protect him, Jacob began to scheme and plan.

In an attempt to defuse the situation, he sent his men ahead with a flattering message, ending with the words, "**and I**

**have sent to tell my lord, that I may
find grace in thy sight."**

Well, there was no response.

Not a word about the past, not a word about
Esau's intention, just his servants'
observations: **"He cometh to meet thee,
and four hundred men with him."**

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Not surprisingly, Jacob was scared to death.
This was the meeting he had been dreading
for 20 years, and this time he knew he
was in the wrong.

But was it the proper response for someone
who had just seen God's angels?

He had recently faced Laban and a company of
armed men, and had been unharmed.

Couldn't God's host protect him from Esau
now?

The problem was, he couldn't see them.

Unbelief is so deeply entrenched in the human heart that past experiences, even recent ones, don't always translate into faith.

V 7-8 **"Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands; 8: And said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape."**

Yes, with God's host about him, the best he could hope for was partial victory. However, to his credit, Jacob did turn to God in prayer, and it was a good prayer.

V 9-12 **"And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return**

unto thy country, and to thy kindred,
and I will deal well with thee:

10: I am not worthy of the least of all
the mercies, and of all the truth,
which thou hast shewed unto thy
servant; for with my staff I passed
over this Jordan; and now I am become
two bands.

11: Deliver me, I pray thee, from the
hand of my brother, from the hand of
Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come
and smite me, and the mother with the
children.

12: And thou saidst, I will surely do
thee good, and make thy seed as the
sand of the sea, which cannot be
numbered for multitude."

Yes, this was a model prayer, and one we
could all learn from.

First, he reminds God of His promises,
which, indeed, many godly men have done
in the past.

Then he thanked Him for previous blessings,
and acknowledges his own unworthiness.

And, finally, he reminds God of the
Abrahamic covenant.

V 12 **"And thou saidst, I will surely do thee
good, and make thy seed as the sand of
the sea, which cannot be numbered for
multitude."**

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But Jacob was still Jacob, and there was
something wrong about his prayer.

After crying for deliverance in a most
effective way, he went right back to
planning the best way to deliver
himself by his own resources.

V 13-23 "And he lodged there that same night; and took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother;

14: Two hundred she goats, and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes, and twenty rams,

15: Thirty milch camels with their colts, forty kine, and ten bulls, twenty she asses, and ten foals.

16: And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by themselves; and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove.

17: And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, Whose art thou? and whither goest thou? and

whose are these before thee?

18: Then thou shalt say, They be thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau: and, behold, also he is behind us.

19: And so commanded he the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him.

20: And say ye moreover, Behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me.

21: So went the present over before him: and himself lodged that night in the company.

22: And he rose up that night, and took

his two wives, and his two
womenservants, and his eleven sons, and
passed over the ford Jabbok.

23: And he took them, and sent them
over the brook, and sent over that he
had."

So the question remains, *Was Jacob leaning
upon God or upon his own resources?*

First he tells God he is afraid of Esau: "**I
fear him, lest he will come and smite
me, and the mother with the children.**"

Then he tries to appease him with some of
his cattle, when it is obvious that
Esau could have taken them all.

Had he actually placed more confidence in a
few cattle than in Jehovah?

Well, we better not be too hard on Jacob,
for we often do the very same thing
ourselves.

We simply add prayer to our own

arrangements: *Lord, please make my plans to turn out all right.*

It's a kind of good luck charm to make our schemes successful, but God doesn't work that way.

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Yes, Jacob was still a schemer, but not for much longer.

He was about to become a new man, a man that God could work with in the Promised Land.

V 24-32 **"And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.**

25: And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled

with him.

26: And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

27: And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.

28: And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

29: And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.

30: And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

31: And as he passed over Penuel the

sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.

32: Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank."

This portion of scripture is often explained as Jacob prevailing in prayer, but that is not really the case.

You see, it was not Jacob wrestling with a man, but a man wrestling with Jacob, and that makes all the difference.

Probably, at the beginning of the encounter, Jacob did not realize who he was wrestling.

However, it appears that this man was none other than the pre-incarnate Christ.

At least, upon reflection, Jacob was convinced that he had "-- **seen God face to face.**"

And, in a sense, this was not the first time that Jacob had met God face to face. All through his life, God had wrestled with Jacob's stubborn will, but this time He would overrule him in spite of his schemes.

That night, Jacob wrestled long and hard, for the struggle went on until morning. Finally, the man rendered him incapable of conflict, but he still *held on*.

Jacob was a broken man, but as was always characteristic of him, he still wanted God's blessing.

However, this time, Jacob wasn't hanging on to his own plans. He was hanging onto

God Himself! **"I will not let thee go,
except thou bless me."**

In response to Jacob's determination, the man asked him what his name was, and he had to admit it was *Jacob*.

Jacob the "supplanter," Jacob the schemer; that was his name!

Many years ago he had convinced his blind father that he was Esau, but now he owns up to his true name and his true nature.

And it is only as we realize who we really are, and who God really is, that our heavenly Father can work with us.

"And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed."

Yes, God breaks and makes anew.

Not only did God give him a new name, but he took away the old name---"**Thy name shall be called no more Jacob.**"

Yes, God can never get the glory until the flesh is subdued.

So, now, the cheat that had left Canaan, and the schemer that had lived in Haran, entered the Promised Land as God's *prince*.

Jacob had met God face to face, and he would never walk the same again.