

Jacob and Laban Made a Covenant

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to respond in a way that honors the Lord, even when others may deceive and cheat them. Jacob was a man who did right even when Laban sinned. In this topic, we see that Jacob and Laban made a covenant.

Laban never did admit that he had sinned against Jacob. Genesis 31:43-45 says, “And Laban answered and said to Jacob, ‘*These daughters are* my daughters, and *these children are* my children, and *this flock is* my flock; all that you see *is* mine. But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne? Now therefore, come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me.’” In fact, in these verses, we see that Laban claimed everything that belonged to Jacob was his. He said that the daughters were his daughters. He said that the children were his children. He said that the flock of animals Jacob had with him was his flock of animals. In fact, he even said that everything Jacob could see belonged to him. This was exactly what Jacob had feared.

However, Laban then added another statement. He said, “...let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me.” The Lord had told Laban, in Genesis 31:24, “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.’” Here, we see that God had warned Laban not to say or do anything to Jacob. As a result, Laban was afraid of what God might do to him. That is why he offered to make a covenant or treaty with Jacob. This covenant was not a covenant of love but a covenant of fear. Many people only read one sentence in the covenant and fail to understand the meaning of that covenant. Laban said that this covenant would be between Jacob and him.

Genesis 31:45-50 says, “So Jacob took a stone and set it up *as* a pillar. Then Jacob said to his brethren, ‘Gather stones.’ And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there on the heap. Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. And Laban said, ‘This heap *is* a witness between you and me this day.’ Therefore its name was called Galeed, also Mizpah, because he said, ‘May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from another. If you afflict my daughters, or if you take *other* wives besides my daughters, *although* no man *is* with us—see, God *is* witness between you and me!’” The first thing Jacob did was to take a stone and set it up as a pillar. Since Jacob had married the two daughters of Laban, the men who had come with Laban were also related to Jacob. We see that Jacob asked these men to gather stones. These men brought stones until they had piled a heap of stones together. The stone that Jacob had set up as a pillar and these stones that were gathered by the others were to be a witness between Jacob and Laban.

Once all of the stones had been gathered, we see that Laban, Jacob and the other men sat down on the stones and ate a meal together. Here, we see that the people of that time had certain things they did when they made a covenant or treaty. This included setting up stones as a witness of the agreement they had made. This way the agreement would be remembered by the following generations of their families. Then, we see that both Laban and Jacob gave a name to this pile of

stones and the pillar. Laban decided to call that pile of stones, and the area around it, “Jegar Sahadutha” which means *heap of witness* in the Aramaic language. Jacob chose the name Galeed and Mizpah. “Galeed” also means *heap of witness*, but it is in the Hebrew language. In contrast, “Mizpah” means *watchtower* which is a tower that people often built where a guard can be placed in the tower to protect a vineyard or a boundary because an enemy, who might come, would be seen at a great distance.

Laban said that the heap of stones was a witness between Jacob and him that day. Through the years, many people have quoted the statement, “‘May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from another’” as a statement of the fact that the Lord would watch over them for good. In contrast, Laban made this statement as a warning to Jacob. God was to be a witness between Laban and Jacob. The word translated “afflict” means *to force or to cause a person to suffer pain*. Here, we see that Laban was warning Jacob not to mistreat his daughters or do anything to them that would hurt them. In addition, Laban said that Jacob was not to take any other wives in addition to his daughters. Laban worshiped idols, but he warned Jacob by using the name of God. Many times, people use the name of God but have no personal relationship with the Creator of heaven and earth. To them God is just another name for a deity.

Laban knew that he probably would never see Jacob or his daughters again, but he wanted Jacob to know that Jacob was to treat his daughters with respect. That is why he said, “God *is* witness between you and me!” He also knew that even though Jacob named the pile of stones watchtower, there would not be a guard in a tower to watch for either Jacob or Laban to come against the other person. That was why they were making a covenant or treaty that they would keep that agreement. Laban was actually protecting everything he had by this treaty because the idols Rachel had hidden in the saddle of the camel could have entitled her to a part of the inheritance of Laban when he died. As a result, Laban was actually making certain that Jacob could never claim that inheritance, even if someone in the family of Jacob had taken those idols. Laban was such a deceiver that he did not trust anyone else.

We go on to read what else Laban said about that pile of stones, in Genesis 31:51-55, where we read, “Then Laban said to Jacob, ‘Here is this heap and here is *this* pillar, which I have placed between you and me. This heap *is* a witness, and *this* pillar *is* a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us.’ And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac. Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread. And they ate bread and stayed all night on the mountain. And early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place.” In these verses, we see that Laban told why he had placed this heap of stones between the place where he lived and the place where Jacob would live in the future. Laban again said that the heap of stones was a witness. However, he also added that he would not pass beyond this heap of stones to do Jacob harm. In addition, he said that Jacob would agree that he would not pass beyond this heap of stones to do harm to Laban or his future family.

Then, Laban said, “‘...The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us.’” Joshua 24:2 says, “And Joshua said to all the people, ‘Thus says the LORD God of Israel: “Your fathers, *including* Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on

the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods.””” Here, we see that Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, and Nahor himself, served other gods. They did not serve the Creator of heaven and earth. It was by the god that his fathers served that Laban made this covenant. Jacob wanted to make sure that he did not claim to serve the gods Nahor and his fathers had served. That is why Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac. Jacob also mentioned the Fear of Isaac, in Genesis 31:42, where we read, ““...Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked *you* last night.”” In this verse, we see that the word is used to refer to the One who had rebuked Laban the previous night. In this way, Jacob made it clear that he did not mix idols in his worship.

We see that Jacob then offered a sacrifice on the mountain and invited everyone there to eat bread with him. The sacrifices of the Old Testament were a covering for sin until Christ came to take away sin. Jacob offered this sacrifice to the Creator of heaven and earth who had rebuked Laban the night before. He invited those with him to eat that sacrifice to recognize that he served the Living and True God. Although Laban and his family did not worship the Living and True God, by eating the meat of that sacrifice, Laban and those with him recognized the True God as the God who Jacob worshiped and served. This meant that they also recognized the covenant or treaty Jacob made with Laban and that they would not break the covenant by passing that point to do harm to Jacob at some future time. In this way, both Laban and Jacob were protected from future harm from the other person. After they ate the meat of the sacrifice, the men slept that night on the mountain.

The next morning, Laban and the men with him got up early to return to their homes in Haran. Laban had been warned by God not to do anything to harm Jacob or to take away anything that Jacob had with him. Now that Jacob had made the covenant that he would not pass beyond that pile of rocks to do harm to Laban, we see that Laban was ready to leave, even though there was still the possibility in his mind that someone in the family of Jacob had his household gods. Laban knew that Jacob could not use those idols to try to get any additional inheritance from Laban. Laban kissed his daughters and his grandchildren before he left to return to his own home in Haran. Laban then gave a blessing to his daughters and grandsons. Here, we see that Laban finally did something to try to show his daughters and their children that he cared for them as he gave them his blessing since it was the last time that he would see them. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain to others the importance of avoiding the example of Laban who did not bless his daughters and grandsons until he knew it was the last time that he would ever see them. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things.