

RETURNING TO THE PROMISED LAND

Jacob's life with Laban had become a series of seven years - the first for Leah, the second for Rachel and the third for his own blessing. With the final seventh year in sight, the Lord directed Jacob back to the promised land of Canaan. Canaan, is a picture or 'type' of heaven, of which some of the blessings can be enjoyed on earth following our conversion (Eph.1:3-6). Jacob's struggles reveal the way in which we learn to subdue the flesh and develop a life of faith and obedience to God.

ENVY AND RESENTMENT v 1-2 – the Lord's blessing upon Jacob, and his corresponding prosperity altered the dynamics in Laban's household. They had been happy as long as Laban was benefiting from the blessing of Jacob's faith and labour. However, when Laban's sons observed their inheritance shrinking in contrast to the multiplication of Jacob's wealth, their envy and resentment grew. God had given Jacob financial and material independence. Christians may also become blessed materially and this could be a snare if not tithed back to God and guarded with the right underlying motive of thanksgiving. It is an opportunity for witness and to support the work of the Lord, not power and coercion.

GOD'S DIRECTION v 3-16 – Jacob's separation from Laban began with his desire to return to his father's house (ch 30:25). That desire was then confirmed by the alienating circumstances of envy from the household of Laban which helped him to detach emotionally (ch 31:1). Then the Lord spoke directly to Jacob, and confirmed that He would go with Him and that his desire was in tune with His will. Jacob's subsequent conversation with his wives revealed the reasoning he applied to his decision and the way in which God balanced and affirmed his perspective:

- Laban had become hostile to Jacob, but Jacob took confidence from knowing that God was with him (v 5)
- He could honestly say that he had served Laban with all his might (v 6)
- Laban had deceived Jacob and changed his wages ten times but God protected Jacob and rewarded him (v 7-9)
- God spoke to Jacob in a dream to ensure Jacob understood that the blessing of speckled sheep was because God had intervened to ensure that the speckled rams mated with the ewes, and not because there was any magic or superstitious power in the rods that Jacob had prepared. It was Jacob's reliance on God for justice that made the difference (v 10-12)
- Jacob had made a vow at Bethel and God was going to lead him back to the land he left and honour the faith that Jacob had put in Him (v 13)

The response of Rachel and Leah to Jacob's appeal was the final affirmation that Jacob needed. They realised their father's greed had made him treat them as a means of profit, rather than gifting them with a dowry as a loving father should. They acknowledged their future inheritance was bound up in God's blessing and agreed to support their husband to follow the Lord's guidance.

SECRET DEPARTURE v 17-21 – with guidance confirmed, Jacob immediately began the journey. Although initiated in secret, it was a much grander affair than Jacob's lonely disgraced departure from the family home twenty years before. On his return, he had camels, flocks, wives and children to accompany him. Unknown to Jacob though, Rachel had stolen her father's teraphim gods that were used in idolatry as a symbol of inheritance rights. She wanted the blessing of Jacob's faith, but couldn't let go of her family's idols and beliefs. In doing so, she deceived her husband, stole from her father and dishonoured God.

In what way does focusing upon our future life in heaven help us to have the right perspective on the things of this world? (Heb.11:8-12)

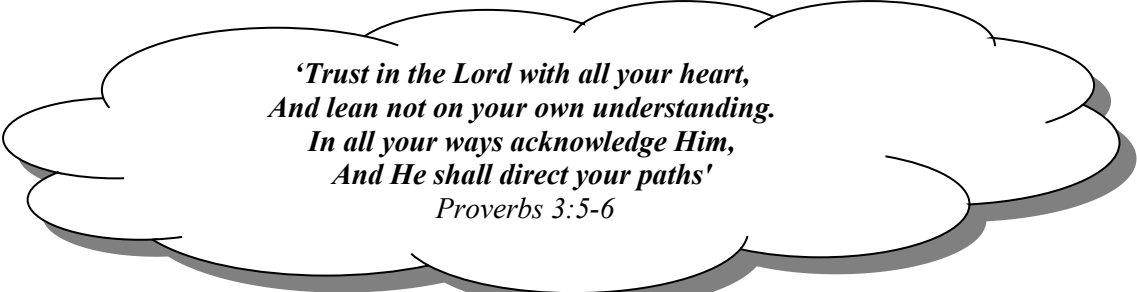
When making decisions in our life how do we ensure that that our desires are:

In tune with God's will? (Prov.3:5-6)

Endorsed by circumstances? (Psalm 119:105-112)

Supported by those affected by the decisions? (1 Cor.3:9-10)

Dependent upon God for blessing? (James 4:13-17)



***'Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths'***
Proverbs 3:5-6