

HOT PURSUIT

Having worked for Laban for such a long time, Jacob knew that the only way he could separate from him, was to run away in secret rather than have an orderly and planned departure. Laban was likely to stall any agreement to let him go.

ANGRY PURSUIT v 22-25 - three days after they left, news reached Laban that Jacob, along with his wives, children, flocks and herds had gone. Laban immediately chased after them, intent on seizing back everything and everyone but Jacob. It took a week for him to catch up with Jacob, during which time the Lord Himself had intervened, warning Laban through a dream, not to make any judgements about Jacob's hasty departure, whether good or bad. Jacob had made his plans before God, and with God's blessing. Laban must respect that and make no comment.

THE ACCUSATION v 26-35 - eventually, when they got to the mountains of Gilead, Jacob had to face his Uncle Laban. He was confronted with

- Why have you stolen away in secret and not allowed a farewell party?
- Why have you not let me to say farewell to my daughters and children?
- Why did you steal my household gods?

Jacob would have been prepared for the first two accusations, but the he was not expecting to be accused of taking household gods. Ancient clay tablets found at Nuzi show that these teraphim were used as legal title to family estates. This explains why Laban was so angry when he suspected Jacob of stealing them. Jacob though, was unaware of Rachel's theft. Since they had lived three days journey from her father, Rachel must either have had the gods for some time, or specifically set about stealing them before they left. Jacob boldly declared that any person found with the gods, would die. It did not enter his head that Rachel would have taken them. Laban's search brought him eventually to Rachel's tent. She however, had craftily hidden them in her camel's furniture and sat upon them, using her 'time of the month' for explanation. Laban respected her womanly excuse and did not humiliate her, or discover her secret. The Lord was merciful to Rachel for Jacob's sake.

JACOB'S DEFENCE v 36-42 - assured of his assumed innocence, Jacob's frustration boiled over. Angrily, he confronted Laban with his unfair and grasping treatment of him over the twenty years he had served him. He rehearsed the quality and honour of his work emphasising that ewes and goats had not miscarried, rams had been faithfully preserved and losses incurred born by him rather than Laban. He had laboured day and night, summer and winter in all weathers. Despite that, Laban had not honoured his hard work, but had cheated him and changed agreements. In conclusion, Jacob pointed out that if the Lord had not directly intervened the night before, Laban would have seized everything Jacob had and sent him away empty.

THE COVENANT v 43 55 – self-interested still, Laban agreed that for his children's sake, he would not seek retribution and requested a formal covenant instead. He wanted assurance that Jacob would not harm, or disinherit his daughters. The 'heap of witness' that bound the agreement was named in both the Chaldean language, native to Laban, and in Jacob's Hebrew tongue, ensuring no confusion of understanding in days to come. Laban also called it 'Mizpah' meaning 'watch tower', claiming God's overseeing eye to ensure the treaty was kept. They then worshipped God and fellowshiped together over a meal. It was their shared faith in God that brought them together and enabled them to make peace. Excavations of archives at Mari and Alalakh (in modern Syria/Iraq) dating to the second millennium BC feature accounts of peer treaties established with stone boundary markers and shared meals, which perfectly mirrors the covenant ritual between Jacob and Laban.

In what situations might we need to flee rather than engage in a planned separation?

How do we react to decisions that people make? Do we respect them as having been made before God and with His will in mind?

Jacob was able to use his exemplary working service as testimony to his rightful ownership of his wages. What should be our attitude to employers and those in authority over us? (Romans 13:1-7)

It appeared that Rachel had succeeded in her deception despite her lack of faith. In what way will we all be required to give an account of our secret sins? (Rom. 2:16 & 14:11-13)

*'Assuredly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth
Will be bound in heaven,
And whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'
Matthew 18:18*