Protection & Separation

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[0:00] Now as we come to the second half of chapter 31, we have the conclusion of Jacob's fleeing, as it were, from Laban. And if you will recollect, if you were here with us last Lord's Day evening, that Jacob at the beginning of chapter 31, he saw that the atmosphere with Laban and his sons and with the whole camp where he was saying it wasn't as it once had been, Jacob had begun to grow rich with the flocks and the herds that the Lord had given him with the conditions that had been set down, the ring-straked and the speckled and the spotted and so on, became Jacob's.

And everyone could see, it was there to witness what was Jacob's and what was Laban's. Laban wasn't getting poor, but Jacob was getting more rich.
And so he saw that the words of Laban, heard the words of Laban, son Jacob hath taken away all that was our fathers. And of that which was our fathers hath he gotten all his glory.
And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and behold, it was not toward him as before. The Lord had said to him it was time to go home. And so this is why he left, and he left suddenly. And we saw the manner in which Laban pursued after him.
He had set three days' journey between his own flocks and herds and Jacob's. And this was so that Jacob could absolutely in no way kind of sneak over and help himself to one or two.
[1:27] It was a complete policy of mistrust, of seeking to ring fence everything that was his own, so that Jacob could not possibly take any of his own or become enriched by any other means.

And yet that three days ended up counting against him. Because when Jacob sets off with all his household, his wives, his children, his men's servants and maid's servants and flocks and herds, it takes three days for any word to reach Laban.
And then he's got three days' journey just to get as it were to base camp, from which Jacob had already set off three days previously. Or six days previously, we might say.
And so when Laban reaches him after seven days' journey, then he has covered the ground pretty quickly. Because he's done in four days what the ground that Jacob and his company have covered in ten.
Remember, Jacob is travelling with women and children with flocks and herds. They're slow-moving. They're not armed men and horses. They're not going at high speed. They're taking ten days to reach the borders of the Holy Land, Mount Gilead, on the east side of the Jordan.
[2:33] Whereas, setting off, as it were, from base camp, Laban reaches them in four days. He is racing after that. Now, this is not the attitude of one who is, you know, grieved and hurt, and he doesn't come up with him and say, What have I done? Why are you going?

You know, this is terrible. You know, you should have said goodbye. You know, we're really going to miss you. Or anything like that. He is coming in anger. And the only reason you're coming in anger is if you think something's been taken from you.
And yes, he's using the excuse of the little household gods. But really, what's annoying him is that Jacob has got away. Jacob has got away with Laban's daughters and grandchildren and the flocks and herds that he has got.
As long as he was staying in Haran, he was part of Laban's extended empire. And now he is going. And Laban is going to be back to himself again.
And the Lord will no longer have any reason to bless Laban's business enterprises as he did when Jacob was there. So Laban is angry. And he is vengeful.
[3:41] But the Lord came to Laban, verse 24, the Syrian in a dream by night and said unto him, Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob, either good or bad.

When we said last Lord's evening, how this is a Hebraism. It's not meant to be taken literally. It doesn't mean keep your lips tight. Don't speak a word at all. But rather, it means don't try and

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influence him.
One way or the other. Don't try to influence him by threatenings. Don't try and influence him by flattery, either good or bad. And we take the example from chapter 24. When Rebekah was going to be leaving Laban and Bethuel in the household, coming to marry Isaac, where we see in chapter 24, at verse 50, Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the Lord, we cannot speak unto thee, bad or good.
It didn't mean that they didn't engage in any more conversation. It meant they didn't try to change their minds. So Laban knows that the Lord has said to him, You are not going to interfere with Jacob here.
But still, he is angry. And he catches up with him. Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mountain. Laban with his brethren pitched in the mountain of Gilead.
[4:52] 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? Now we know that that is untrue.

Because as we see earlier in the chapter, that Jacob consults with his wives. He brings them out to the field, to the fox and herds where he is. And discreetly asks them, says, Look, things are not as they once were with your dad and with me.
And, you know, he's no longer positive towards me. We need to go. And the Lord has appeared to me and told me it's time to go. What do you think? And they say, Well, we've got no inheritance here.
He sold us for a start. Didn't give us any dowry. Didn't give us any inheritance. Just for your seven years of labor for each of us. We've got nothing. So anything you've got belongs to us and belongs to our children as well.
There's nothing for us here. We might as well come with you. We're happy to come with you. You do whatever God has said to you. So he's not exactly going, taking them as captives, taking them with a sword.
[5:49] It's an excuse. It is Laban attributing the worst possible motives to Jacob. Perhaps attributing to Jacob motives that he himself might have practiced.

And you see that this is a feature throughout the passage that we read. That Laban is putting the worst possible spin on what Jacob has done. And apart from his little outbursts, really, from verse 36 to verse 42, Jacob says almost nothing throughout this whole time.
Laban is full of bluster and full of protest and full of all the protestations of how wrong he has been and how all these things really belong to him. But, you know, as a big man, that magnanimous guy, he's going to let him go and he's going to have a covenant with him and everything will be okay. What a great guy I am for being so magnanimous. And it's all bluster. And it's all words. And at the end of the day, it does not change a thing.
Because they part just as they would have done. And Laban perhaps saves face a wee bit. But Jacob just carries on determinedly into the promised land. But God does not allow Laban to change the course or direction of what he has called Jacob to do.
[7:07] 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 and with tabret and with heart? Now, it is quite possible, this may be true, that verse 27, that he would have said, Oh, we'd have had a party, we'd have had music and dancing and all the rest of it.

Because what he might mean is, that's all you would have got from me. I'll sing till the cows go home. I'll have music and parties and dancing. But you're not getting a single hoof of my cattle or my fox or my herd.
You're not getting a single penny of my money. And I'm keeping my wife and my daughters and my grandchildren, but you can go. And that's probably what he would have tried to do. This is what Jacob himself says.
I was afraid. I said, can't adventure of our study. One that was taken by force, thy daughters from me. And Laban says, oh, we'd have sent you away with music and dancing and parties and so on. And maybe that's true. But the likelihood of that is all he would have got. All the music you want. All the parties you want. We'll feast for you. And then we'll send you off into the white blue yonder with exactly what you came here with.
[8:13] You crossed this Jordan with your staff. That's what you'll go away with. These are my daughters. These are my grandchildren. These are my flocks and herds. You go. And that is

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probably what would have happened.

But the Lord does not allow these things to happen. And also, there is something of a contrast where Laban, I mean, remember is pretty much a worldling as far as, you know, the business side of things is concerned.
The Lord is just kind of brought into things when it's convenient. But we see a contrast here. If we go back again to chapter 24 when Rebecca goes off to be Isaac's wife.
And they send her away with blessings, with prayers. At verse 60 of chapter 24, they blessed Rebecca and said unto her, Thou art our sister. Be thou the mother of thousands and millions, and that thy seat possess the gates of those that they've done.
So they sent away Rebecca, their sister, and her son, and Abram's son, and his men, and they blessed her. So with prayers and with blessings, they send her away. And Laban says, Oh, we're just thinking about music and dancing and parties.
[9:18] And, you know, such was the decayed state of any such relationship he might have had with the Lord before. It's not, well, we'd have gathered round, we'd have worshipped, we'd have blessed you and sent you away with our prayers and with our blessings.

Oh, we'd have sent you away with a party. Sent you away with music and dancing and all the rest of it. But I'm keeping everything to myself. That is likely what he meant. You might say, well, come on, you're reading too much into this.
You've got no evidence for that. We have the evidence of the way that Laban behaved with Jacob in the preceding 20 years. The testimony that Jacob himself states in this chapter, and which the Lord at no time contradicts.
And rather, the Lord affirms the truth of what Jacob has said. Thou hast not suffered me to kiss my sons and my daughters. Thou hast done foolishly, and so do he. It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt.
Verse 29. But the God of your father. Notice the way that he refers to him. He doesn't say the Lord, whom we all worship. You know, like he tries to say later on.
[10:21] At verse 53. He says, the God of your father spoke to me. Yes, the night saying, take thou heed, thou speak not to Jacob, either good or bad. He puts distance between himself and this almost alien deity.

He who has prevented him from doing what he wanted to do. It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt. Now, why would you even say that? Here you are coming after your son-in-law, your own daughters, your own grandchildren, supposedly wanting to remeciate.
Oh, what have I done? You know, what have I offended against you? Why have you gone looking for something wrong between us? You know, let's put it right. Come home. Come back. You know, not a word about that.
This passage is as significant for what Laban doesn't say as it is for what he does say. There is no question of any sort of, oh, what have I done?
You know, what's my wrong? Have I offended you in some way, Jacob? There's no word of that. In other words, he knows fine why Jacob is going. He knows fine how he himself has behaved.
[11:26] He knows fine what he has done and the short practice he has been. What angers him is that Jacob has got away. Here he is on the very borders of Canaan, the borders of the promised land.

His company now, camped as they are, far out in numbers Laban. And now, by means of geography, he is in a weaker position than he would have been if he had got an inheritance surrounded by his own people and with nowhere for Jacob to turn.
It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt. That's his threat. That's his power. I could harm you. I could do you bad things. Why would he even want to? Except that that is what is his thought.
That is probably his intention. Coming to teach Jacob a lesson. Coming to do him harm. But, God stopped me. Rats.
Oh, how could he? Never mind. We'll just have to do the best we can. This almost certainly was his true intention. In the power of my hand to do you hurt, I'm going to teach you a lesson.
[12:37] You can't just walk off whenever you like. You can't just take my daughters and my grandchildren and my flock to my herd, which are actually Jacob's anyway, and just go. Why did you do this?

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And now, lo, thou wouldst need to be gone because thou so alone is after thy father's house. As if that was the real reason. It's a face-saving excuse. Yet wherefore hast thou stolen my God?
And with this, he feels he has an actual grievance, which you could say perhaps he does. Rachel has stolen the graven images. Jacob doesn't know this, but she has taken them herself.
And we read of that previously when we saw verse 19 last week. Rachel had stolen the images that were her father's. But he thinks, because you've stolen my gods, this is my cast-iron reason.
This is my reason to prove I'm righteous and you're a thief. And then I'll have the moral high ground.
And now, lo, thou wouldst be gone. Yet wherefore hast thou stolen my gods?
[13:37] Jacob answered, and it's a brief answer. Because I was afraid. I said, peradventure thou wouldst take my force, thy daughters, from me. If you take the mothers, the children will have to stay with them.

So I'll lose all my sons and my daughter. Now, how am I going to get my flocks and herds back across the desert without my family, without the menservants and maidservants and everybody else? You take my daughters, you take my wives, you take everything.
Because the children will stay with their mother. And the maidservants belong to the wives. And the menservants, yes, he could go, but who's going to go without this family? All he needs to do is lay hold on his own daughters, and he's got Jacob.
Right there, when he wants them. And that is, he said, what I thought you were going to do. Thou take their daughters from me. Whomsoever the finest I got, as if I've got any use for your graven images.
Let them not live. Fine, put them to death. Before our brethren, discern what his mind would be. And take it to me. For Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them. Laban went into Jacob's tent, into Leah's tent, into the two main servants' tent.
[14:44] But he found them not. Now notice even what he's doing here. He's not saying, well, if you swear to me that nobody touched them, that'll be good enough for me. No, he's not. He's going through every single time.

Can you just imagine? Can you imagine a father-in-law rummaging through his son-in-law's tent and goods and package and luggage, then going into his elder daughter's tent and doing the same, and into the maid servant's tent, and finally into Rachel's tent.
And Rachel, of course, often it's an appropriate liar, a dude liar, whatever. There's no really such thing. But she lies. She hides it under the camel's saddle, and she claims that, as she says, the custom of women is upon me.
And that would have made Laban, of course, back off. Then, of course, and also later under the laws of Moses, a sort of, you know, paranoid fear of being contaminated by anything to do with that particular affliction that is, of course, unique to the feminine gender.
So it's the custom of women is upon me. And he searched over them, but he found them not. But the very fact that he searched, rummaging through every single tent and every single place, shows the manner of man that he is.
[15:58] Not necessarily the desperation that he has for these gods, although his own idolatrous influence almost certainly influenced Rachel. She obviously had some desire for these gods.

We read, as we mentioned last week, you go on to chapter 35. Jacob said to his household, verse 2, put away the strange gods that are among you. So some of them must have kept on with these false gods.
Jacob himself has no desire for them. And now when he knows he's in the clear, the righteous anger rises up. This is Jacob's longest little soliloquy here in the entire chapter.
It is outburst that he cannot contain any longer. He was wroth and chawled with lamb out. And I said, what is my trespass? What is my sin that thou hast so hotly pursued after me?
I said, all my stuff. What have you found? Set it here before my brethren and thy brethren. They may judge betwixt us both. This 20 years have I been with thee.
[16:58] Now this is a helpful verse because it indicates to us exactly how long Jacob has been. Then it's 14 years, seven for Rachel, seven for Ria. And then it's six years now that he's been amassing the flocks and the herds, the ring-straight and the speckled and so on to himself.

So he's built up a lot of wealth in just the space of six years. As well as the time that he has served for his respective wives and the children that they have had. And when he says, thy ewes and thy she-goats have not cast their young.

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They haven't miscarried. Now, in one sense, that's not down to Jacob. Because you can't help, you know, what happens in the reproductive system of the sheep or of the goats or whatever.
So the Lord has blessed the livestock for Jacob's sake. It also would imply, however, that he has been attentive. When he knew that they were about to give birth, he'd be there with the ewes.
He'd be there with the she-goats. He would make sure that they were looked after, that they had all the help that they needed. So the young were born safely. So they were able to thrive. He has been a diligent and attentive shepherd and goat-herd and leader of the herds and so on.
[18:07] That which was torn of beasts I brought unto thee. I bear the loss of it. Now, it was the rule and the law that any who had charge of flocks or herds, if any went missing, then they bore the cost of it.

Because, the rule was, understandably, you're meant to be keeping watch over it. You're meant to be looking after this herd or this flock. If any goes missing, it's your fault. Nobody should have been able to lick it.
Nobody should have been able to get in and steal it if you're doing your job. So if anything went missing, then you had to make it good. You had to pay for it. But if a wild beast came and attacked the flock or the herd and it was torn and it was, you know, wounded to death, if you brought the carcass and you presented it to your employer and said, Look, it's torn by wild beasts.
I couldn't do anything about that. I can watch for thieves. I can keep an eye out for those who might be stealing. But I can't do anything about wild beasts because they attacked so suddenly. And that would be your proof that you weren't guilty.
So the master would bear the cost of that loss. But Jacob says, If anything was torn by wild beasts, I didn't bring it to you. I bore the cost. I bore the loss of it.
[19:20] Of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. In other words, Laban did not even permit Jacob that which the law would have permitted.

If anything was attacked or torn by a wild beast and Laban should have borne the cost, Jacob bore the cost instead. He subsidized his employer, in other words.
Thus was I in the day. The drought consumed me and the frost by night and my sleep departed from my eyes. Again, this underlines to us the hard nature of constant attention to flocks and herds in the field.
It's not a case of, oh, the shepherd replying on the grassy bank, playing his wee flute, and there's the sheep just six feet away from him, all grazing nicely. You know, if you had to stay out in the fields, in the Middle East, then the temperatures go from raging heat during the day to freezing cold at night.
And they can go, they can alter very, very rapidly. So this is what he means when he says, you know, the frost by night and the drought consumed me by day. So raging heat by day, freezing cold at night.
[20:31] He couldn't go to sleep at night because he had to watch out for the good of the flocks and the herds. It was hard work. It wasn't just a pass-through idol where he could take it easy and just relax and keep an eye on the well-behaved flocks and herds.

It was hard work. All the lambing, all the goat-sealing, all the flocks and herds increasing. He had to work at it. He worked hard. And the Lord blessed his labor.
Thus have I been 20 years in thy house. I served thee 14 years for thy two daughters and six years for thy cattle. And thou hast changed my wages ten times.
As we said last week, you know, it doesn't mean literally one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. It's just an indeterminate large number. That's what ten times is often used in Scripture. It means a large number of times. You kept chopping and changing whatever the rules were. You kept shifting the goalposts. And I just accepted it all this time. Accept the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac have been with me.
[21:36] Surely thou hast sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction. I am the labor of my hands and rebuked thee yesterday night. And you'll notice that Laban at no time denies this.

He doesn't say, oh, no, no, no, I wouldn't have sent you away empty. He does say, hey, we'd have got a party. We'd have music and dancing. We'd have sent you away with all the joy and all the conviviality that we could master.
But he doesn't say, no, no, Jacob, I would have never sent you away empty. I'd have given you everything that was yours. He doesn't attempt to deny it at all.

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And this is why we say that this passage is as significant for what Laban doesn't say as it is for what he does say. Jacob states, I was afraid I thought you would take your daughters by force and not let them come with me.
And except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, the fear of Isaac have been with me. Surely thou hast sent me away now empty. And there is no denying of it.
[22:41] Because clearly that would have been Laban's intention. God hath seen my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked the yes and the man. Now, there is a sense of humility here in verse 42.

Jacob, remember, after chapter 28, when he says, If I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord, in other words, Jehovah be my God.
Not just the God of Abraham, not just the God of Isaac, but my God. He will be the one in personal relationship with me. I will worship him alone. But he doesn't claim that he has said, oh, because he was my God, he looked after me.
But rather, the God of my father. This is in a sense humility. And he doesn't claim that God looked after him because he was special. But rather, God had mercy upon him for the sake of Abraham and for the sake of Isaac, who were the saints of the Lord.
He had been with me. Surely thou hast sent me away. God had seen my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked thee yesterday. And Laban answered and said to Jacob, These daughters are my daughters.
[23:49] These children are my children. These cattle are my cattle. All of us see is mine. What can I do this day? Unto these my daughters, or unto their children which they are born. You've always seen a grinding of teeth that should be mine.

But I can't get hold of it now. God is stopping me. Now, therefore, come. Let us make a covenant. I am done. And let it be for a witness between me and thee. In other words, let's make the best of a bad situation.
I can't actually take everything back. So the best that I can do is make out now that Jacob, strong, powerful, wealthy man that he is. Hey, this is my son-in-law.
These are my connections. My relatives over in Canaan. Oh, yes, he's wealthy and he's bigger. That's my son-in-law. You know, if we can't get everything back, then at least we will formally establish the connection between us and the covenant between us so that I will at least benefit in some way from the knowledge that if I can't get what you've got, I'll at least underline that you won't be able to do me harm.
This is the best deal Laban can get. And he wants something that will save face, something that will at least secure what is left of him.
[25:05] But what is Jacob's line in all this? Jacob just intends to get out. He intends to go home. And if this makes Laban happy, fine, he'll do it.

What I want you to notice in this latter part of the chapter from verse 43 onwards is how much Laban talks and how little Jacob talks.
Apart from his outbursts proclaiming his innocence. Then Laban says, oh, come on, let's make a covenant. Jacob took a stone and set it up for a pillar. Jacob said to his brother and gather stones. And they took stones and made a heap. Laban called it Jigar Sahadutha. Jacob called it Balit, Galit. They both mean heap of witness. Laban is referring to it in the Chaldean or Syriac language. Jacob is referring to it in Hebrew. But it means the same thing. It means heap of witness. This heap is a witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galit.
[26:08] And Mizpah, which means either a beacon or a watchtower, again in Hebrew. For he said, the Lord. Now he's bringing the Lord into it. The Lord watch between me and thee when we are absent from one another.

If thou wilt afflict my daughters, and if thou shalt take thy wives behind them. In 20 years he's been with them. 14 years he served with his daughters. And in the six years since he finished serving with them.
After the first seven years, he had both daughters. In all that time, 13 years. Had he ever afflicted them? Had he ever done anything bad to them? And yet he didn't slap them and say, oh, if you do bad things to my God, if you take other wives.
Now as Jacob's wealth expanded, he could easily have added more wives if he had wanted. But he didn't choose to. He loved Rachel. He had Leah as well.

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And he honored her as his wife. But he didn't want more wives. He didn't want to add to a number of his wives here. He didn't want to afflict them. But Laban is casting these aspersions on Jacob. [27:08] He is ascribing to Jacob motives that he doesn't possess. In order to save face. Behold this heap. Behold this pillar which I have cast between me and thee.

Now, quick reality check. Verse 51. Which I have cast. Look back to verses 45 and 46. Who sets up the pillar? Jacob took a stone and set it up for a pillar.
Jacob said to his brethren, gather stones. And they took stones and made a heap. And did eat there upon the heap. Not Laban. He says, oh, let's make a covenant. But Jacob does not.
Jacob says, right, we're going to do this properly. Set up the stone. Gather the stones. We'll have this sort of covenant fellowship meal together. Jacob is the one. Just do it quietly. Doing it right. Getting on with it.
But Laban is the one. Say, oh, I've done this. I've done that. You know. When Laban is the one who cannot be trusted. When he's the one whom Jacob feared that he would take his daughters from. [28:05] Why did he fear this? Well, Jesus says in Luke 16, verse 10. He says, he that is faithful in that which is least. Is faithful also in much.

And he that is unjust in the least. Is unjust also in much. Now, Laban had proved himself unjust. He had changed Jacob's wages so many times.
He had shifted the goalposts over and over again. He would undoubtedly have taken whatever he could from Jacob. But he's not been able to. And now he's lustening and protesting. Oh, let's make this covenant.
I've set up this pillar. This heap be witnessed. This pillar be witnessed. I will not pass over this heap to thee. Because I cannot. And thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me for harm. But he doesn't want to. The last thing Jacob ever wants to do now is go back to Haran. He does not want to go back and see Laban anymore. And Laban makes a big play of this. Oh, I won't come and attack you.
[29:02] And you don't come and attack me. No, fine. Just go home. And I want to go home. Put distance back between me and you Laban elsewhere. Whatever you like. Jacob is effectively saying, the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us.

And this is all Laban speaking. All this bluster. All this effort to kind of cover his own embarrassment. His own weakness here. Now, when he says the God of Nahor, as well as the God of Abraham, if you were to go back to chapter 11 and you see something of the genealogy and the descent from Shem and the time of the flood, find that Shem is the first generation since the flood. By the time you get to Abraham and his brother Nahor, they are the tenth generation since the flood. And of course, a family which may have begun worshipping the one true God.
And at the time of the flood, when they were on the ark, Noah and his family, it was only the one true God they had any dealings with. But within a couple of generations, of course, idolatry would have come in.
People invented gods out of their own heads. They started worshipping stone and wood and images carved from these things. Terah is Abraham's father, Nahor's father.
[30:19] If you look back in chapter 11, you see these things. He has these three sons, Abraham, Nahor, and Haram. Haram becomes Lot's father. And Lot, remember, is the one who goes and makes his home in Sodom and Gomorrah.

Abraham marries his half-sister. Not an ideal situation. Nahor marries his niece. Still not brilliant, but pretty good compared to Abraham. And then later on, a little bit further down, Isaac marries his first cousin once removed, Rebecca.
By the time Jacob is marrying Leah and Rachel, that's his second cousins once removed. Laban is Jacob's second cousin. So it's all kind of interconnected here, all the family relationships here.
And it should be the true God they've been worshipping all the way down through the covenant line. And he's been in there. He's been in there, but other gods have gone in there as well.
Even for Abraham initially. Remember way back in chapter 11, chapter 12, where we read, So Abraham departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him.
[31:45] And all the gods that he had also attended upon and worshipped in Ur of the Chaldees or Haran, they never stopped doing. They never gave him any instruction. We think, oh, but how do we know that Abraham actually worshipped these other gods before?

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Because the word of God tells us. Joshua 24, verse 2. Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood, that means the other side of the river Euphrates, in old time.
Even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor. And they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, multiplied his seed, gave him Isaac.
They served other gods. One reason why God takes Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, and out of Haran, and into the promised land, is so that he will be alone there, with no one else to turn except to God.
And sometimes, this is what the Lord does with us. He takes us away from all our support networks. He takes us away from all our other distractions, so that we have nowhere else to turn but to him.
[33:01] Now, like most other ministers, I have a study. A study is meant to be a place where you shut out the rest of the world, you focus on your books, your studies, your preparation, and so on, and all the rest of it.

Why not just do it, you know, in the same room in front of the TV, with everybody else playing Xboxes, and playing music, and what all the rest of it? Because you can't concentrate with all this other noise and distraction.
And likewise, Abraham and Ur of the Chaldees cannot focus on the one true living God, and all these other gods everybody's worshipping, and going to this temple, and that temple, and the next temple. Sometimes, the Lord needs to take us out of a situation of distractions.
Out of a situation of background noise, and remove us from our comfort zone, and take us to somewhere where we may be a foreigner, where we may be an alien in a different land, where we know nobody.
As Abraham knew, nobody except the Lord. And he had no one else to support him, and no one else to depend upon except the Lord.
[34:07] And the Lord brought him into Canaan. And the Lord said to him, this land I will give it to your descendants. And for all those years, 25 years, Abraham was like, okay, that's great, Lord, but what descendants?

I haven't got any kids. I'm old. Say that's old. We're past the age where we can have family. And the Lord kept saying to him, it'll be your seed, your children, that will inherit. And Abraham believed God.
He trusted in the Lord. He kept on being the friend of God. Now, in a sense, you could say Abraham had greater faith because he turned his back on all the gods that he used to worship, but Nahor and all the others worshiped.
A little aside here, where Laban is saying, the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, that is, by the way, their respective grandfathers, Jacob's grandfather and Laban's grandfather, Nahor and Abraham.
And yes, they both worshiped other gods. Abraham came out of Ur of the Chaldees. Nahor stayed there to begin with. Yes, he later on moved to Haran, but when Abram's father, Terah, came out with Abram and Haran and Lot and so on, Nahor stayed behind.
[35:19] He stayed amongst the idolatry. He stayed in Ur of the Chaldees. Well, later on, he came out. We've got no suggestion that Nahor abandoned his idolatry. Now, is Abraham better because he turned away from his idolatry and embraced the true God?

In one sense, yes. But then you've got Isaac, the saint of the Lord. Now, we read, Jacob swear by the fear of his father, Isaac. Isaac is a child of promise, a child of the covenant.
From the time of his conception in the womb until the day he dies, he never has a different God than the Lord Jehovah. He's the first generation, probably since the flood, that is exclusively serving and loving the living God for his own life.
The fear of his father, Isaac. It doesn't mean, oh, I'm terrified of my dad. It means that which Isaac feared and reverenced and worshipped and loved his whole life.
Now, Abraham, of course, he took another wife after Sarah died. And, of course, there was Hagar as well. Isaac, there was only ever Rebecca. Despite the tensions there might have been, despite the difficulties there might have been in the family, she was the love of his life and the Lord.
[36:37] And there was nobody else. Jacob and his two wives. And Jacob, yes, all sorts of things went on in his life. But Isaac, the saint of the Lord, exclusive to the Lord, which is better?

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The one who turns his back in idolatry and embraces the Lord are the one whose whole life is pure and wholly given to the Lord. Well, I would suggest to you, the Lord takes and makes use of both Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the chancer, the twister.
There's there, there's characters in there for all of us. And some will be pure saints of the Lord and some will be very impure. And some will have had a life of the world and idolatry and its distractions and turned our backs on it.
And others will have been chancers and twisters. And no better than we should be. And yet the Lord takes and uses such. The God of Abraham and the God of Nahar, the God of their father, judged betwixt us.
And Jacob swore by the feet of his father, Isaac. Then Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount, notice again, who offers? Jacob. Do we read that Laban offers a sacrifice on the mount?
[37:43] No, we don't read that at all. And he called his brethren to eat bread. They did eat bread. They tarried all night on the mount. But anything that is worthy, Jacob is doing it. Anything that is bluster in all words and all talk, Laban is doing it.

You see this gulf that is opened up between them. So much greater than mere miles, than mere distance. In fact, even before Jacob had left, what he ended up, the miles and distance he ended up putting between Laban and himself, was simply a physical expression of the spiritual distance that there was between them.
And that we must understand, I would suggest to you, which was permanent on earth, becomes permanent in eternity. Early in the morning, Laban rose up and kissed his sons and his daughters and blessed him.
You can just imagine everybody standing around, sort of watching on edge, making sure that that's all he does, heading off into the sunset, and they go, okay, fine, he's gone. Laban departed and returned to his own place.
What does that remind us of? There's a passage, remember, at the end of Acts chapter 1, where it talks about somebody else, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship from which Judas, by transgression, fell, that he might go to his own place.
[39:08] Now, maybe the own place is not the same. Maybe we're not saying, oh, Laban ended up in hell, but if Laban wasn't redeemed by Christ, if he wasn't redeemed by the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, there's no other place for him to go.

Laban built his treasures upon earth, not upon heaven, not upon the Lord. The Lord was just a convenient name to be dropped in now and then.
He's full of bluster, he's full of talk, he's full of noise. Of Jacob, we might say, the words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools, as Ecclesiastes tells us.
And here's Jacob conspicuous by how little he serves and how tight-lipped he is and how quietly determined to obey the Lord and go back to the promised land.
And here's Laban chasing after him, determined to get whatever he can, and the Lord says, thus far and no further. And yes, they part in peace, but they part and they part forever.
[40:10] Now there is a sense in which we all intermingle, one with another here upon earth. And many amongst our families and loved ones may not know the Lord, maybe we don't know the Lord and others in our families do.

But we mingle together and we get on together and some of us have the Lord in our hearts and others don't and it doesn't mean anybody's better than anybody else. It just means the Lord has grace. And we recognize where we are to be building our foundations.
Whether it is in this world which passes away or in that world which will not pass away because that separation will come just as it comes for Jacob and Laban. And it comes here at the end of this chapter physically.
And I would strongly suggest to you that it is highly likely that it also came eternally. Those who we have loved and worked amongst, the Lord gives us for a time and we will be an influence for good or ill in their lives.
But what we are and who we are will come out as much with the little things as they will with the big ones. He that is faithful in little will be faithful also in much and he that is unjust in that which is least will be unjust also in that which is greatest.
[41:22] Early in the morning Laban rose up, kissed his sons and his dogs and blessed them. And Laban departed and returned to his place. Jacob went on to the promised land.

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Laban went back, back to the world. Friends, when we come to part one from another, where is it we will be going? Where is it you will be heading?
It is something for us to consider which is dependent not on the number of our flocks or herds or the amount of money in the bank. It is where our inheritance is rooted, whether it is in the dawn of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, whether it is in Christ, his beloved son or whether it is in this world because we will go to one place or the other.
Laban returned to his place. Judas went to his own place. And the Lord Jesus says that he has gone ahead of us to prepare a place for them that love him, that he may come again and receive them unto himself.
We are all going somewhere. Where is it that you will be going?

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