

The Great Escape

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[0 : 00] Now we come in this 31st chapter, dealing with the relationship of Isaac's son, Jacob, now with his father-in-law, Laban. We come to a stage of what we might call strife.

Strife between the different parts of the family here, and strife particularly between Jacob and Laban. And it's a very subtle strife. There's no sort of striving together in terms of fighting between the different herdmen as there was between Adam and Lot and Abraham in days of old.

But there is a subtle chilling of the temperature. He heard the words of Laban's son saying, Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's.

And all that which was our father's hath he gotten all this glory. It's glory, meaning, not glory itself, but the enlarging of his own flocks and herds in a way that only the Lord could have disposed.

Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and behold, it was not toward him as before. Now Jacob, of course, has done nothing particularly to merit this enmity, except that he has prospered, and Laban has not.

[1 : 12] Every time Laban set new conditions for his wages or what he should receive, the Lord simply ordered it that Jacob would prosper that way.

In Ecclesiastes, we read chapter 4, verse 4. Again, I consider it all travail and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbor. For travail, for hard work, for right work, and for the success and blessing upon it, he is envied of his neighbor.

For this is also vanity and vexation of spirit. And the likelihood is not that Laban's flocks and herds had reduced, simply that Jacob's had enlarged exponentially, and that when he began to say, this is what my wages will be, and Laban would change the rules, every time the rules were changed, Jacob would end up prospering by it.

And Laban would continue with his own flocks and herds, but Jacob's would grow and grow and grow. So there is envy here, and the situation, the atmosphere has changed.

And because the atmosphere has changed, what is going to happen? Jacob either has to win completely and take over whatever Laban has, but that would be theft, and that would be in a sense ingratitude for the opportunity Laban has given him, or he has to acknowledge that Laban is going to end up trying to take back everything that he has got, and send him away empty.

[2 : 37] There was a real danger of this. If we were to look ahead to the section we didn't read, verse 42, he said, except the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou had sent thee away now empty.

God hath seen mine affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked thee yesterday. So what we have here is Jacob knowing and having the protection, the help of the God of Abraham and Isaac, and now the God of Jacob.

And one thing that we probably don't notice at the first reading is just how much God is in this section of the chapter as we read it.

Here he is at verse 3. The Lord said unto Jacob, verse 5, the God of my father hath been with me. Verse 7, God suffered him not to hurt me.

Verse 9, thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father. The angel of God, verse 11, spake unto me in a dream, saying, Jacob, and I said, here am I. And that's the angel of God speaking all the way down to verse 30.

[3 : 42] I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointest the pillar. And Rachel and the answer to him said, Is there yet any portion of inheritance for us in our father's house? Therefore are all the riches which God hath taken from our father, that is ours, and our children's.

Now then whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do. So the Lord is there right through all these sections, and when Jacob begins to act on what the Lord commands him to do, and Laban is about

to catch up with them, God, verse 24, 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.

So when there is the potential for strife, when there is a possibility of falling out amongst the different parts of the family over, as is usual, property and money, and that's usually the two most toxic things in any extended family, and I know that we're all no instances of that.

Everybody's getting a loan fine, and then somebody leaves a bit of property, or money to somebody, somebody else wants it. Property and money, property and money. Always the things that end up causing strife, and difficulty in families.

And here we have here, the flocks and the herds enlarging exponentially for Jacob, and Laban's just staying pretty much as they were.

[5 : 04] But God is in this. God is the one going to make sure that the strife does not overspill, and there's going to be difficulties like Abraham and Morty for the separate.

And Jacob, having been sent by the Lord into the land of Paranarim, we go back to chapter 28.

Remember what he says to verse 15, Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places, whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land, for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

And throughout all this time, which we know to have been twenty years, because he says, verse 38, again we haven't read that yet, but verse 38, So twenty years later, God, having been with Jacob all the time that he is in Syria, is now calling him home.

The Lord said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred, and I will be with thee. And there is the promise.

He has promised to be with them before, and he is reaffirming that promise now. It would be foolish of us to think, oh well that's the first time God has spoken to Jacob in twenty years.

[6 : 42] Jacob needs, must have been, maintaining his relationship with the Lord, throughout all that twenty years. God has blessed him in that time, he has prospered him in his family, he has prospered him in his business, and now he is calling him to go home, to go back to the land of Canaan.

But Jacob, despite the difficulties he is facing in Syria, in Paddan Aram, there with Laban, he has not said, I'll stop this, you know, Laban's been bad for me now, his sons are moaning about me, just because I'd increased my flocks and herds, that's it, I'm on my way home.

He continues, slogging away where he is, faithfully serving, until he receives this word from the Lord. Now we don't know for sure, whether Jacob was just afraid to go back because of Esau, or whether he was being determinedly, waiting on a word from the Lord, but either way, God takes it out of his question, God takes it out of his power to decide, because the Lord, verse 3, speaks to himself, now return.

If there was any doubt, if circumstances weren't making you think, time to go home, time to go back, now I should go, the Lord is giving him an explicit word, and you will find no doubt, in many aspects of life, I don't doubt many of you will have found this, certainly I've found it in my own life, that quite often, when there is anxiety about a decision to be taken, whether we should do this, whether we should do that, which way we should turn, so often God does the equivalent of painting you into a corner.

God takes the decision out of your hands, so that there ends up being, nothing else that you can do, without blatant disobedience to the Lord, because no doubt, Jacob must have been feeling for some time, this is really uncomfortable now, this is not how it was before, Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, behold it was not toward him as before, Laban is still doing well, but Jacob is doing better, and this is a cause for envy, and the Lord said to Jacob, return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred, and I will be with thee, now no doubt, he could have gone at any time he chose, but he wouldn't have had the Lord with him, and he is acting on his own, and sometimes believers do that, sometimes believers think, oh well I'm a Christian, I'm a believer, it doesn't matter what I do, God will support me, God will be with me in it, well we all know ourselves, now I hope we were young, or if we had children of our own, or whatever they may choose to do this, or choose to do that, and some of it, we will approve and encourage them, and others we think, oh what on earth is this, did they do that, and sometimes, we get people apart from those they love, because one says, no you should do this,

[9 : 36] I say no I'm determined to do that, and sometimes believers do that with the Lord too, God makes clear his instruction, whether by speaking to them, whether in prayer, or in a word, when he

makes it so clear, or through his own written word, he leaves them in no doubt, but they are determined, no I'm going to do what I want, I want to do this, I've got the spirit in me, I've got God's spirit, is leading me to do this, even if God is stating, no do something different, but up until now, God has clearly, encouraged Jacob to remain, now, God says, go back, so if Jacob had gone back before, when he had been disobedient, well we would have to say, well yes he would have been, because it's not just the case of, it's either bad to stay, or bad to go, there is a time, for everything, God's time, is always the perfect time, and this is the point, at which the Lord is saying, to return unto the land, now of thy fathers, first of all, the Lord had said,

I'll be with you, wherever you go, whatever you do, but it has to be in his direction, and there is God's time, now, there is that, which if we anticipate, God's decision, becomes either foolishness, in our part, or perhaps sin, in our part, if we seek to preempt God, if we drag our heels, and don't appear, to do what, when God commands us, to do something, this is the Lord's time, and this is his direction, the Lord, painted him into a corner, the Lord made it so, he had effectively, no choice, the Lord says, now, go, and I will be with you, now I don't know, what situation you're in your life, I don't know what's going on, in your individual homes, and lives, and work, and what have you, but if there is a situation, where you don't know, which way to turn, or you're not sure of this, so that decision should be made, you take it to the Lord, and if he hasn't already, made it clear, maybe he has made it clear, and you say, no, no, no, I don't want to do that Lord,

I really don't want to do that, there's got to be some other way, that's a familiar enough scenario, isn't it, but you will find, that as and when, and only when, we submit, to the Lord's own will, and direction, you will find, that peace of heart, and peace of spirit, of knowing, that your will now, is in line with his, and he will be with you, in the way, that he then lets, whatever that situation is, whatever that question may be, the Lord said unto Jacob, return, unto the land of thy fathers, unto thy kindred, and I will be with thee, Jacob might have thought, well if I stayed a bit longer, I might just make bigger flocks, and I might get even richer, I might do fine, but no, he obeys, Jacob sent, and called Rachel, and Leah, to the field, unto his flock, and notice Rachel, is mentioned first, name order, is always significant, in scripture, Rachel is named first, not because she is, the first wife, she is the second wife, by all of seven days, but she is the one, that you know, he originally contracted for, she was the wife, of his choosing, she was his originally, designed wife, it's only right, that she should be named first, in that sense, although Leah, by this time, would be way considered, the more important wife, for all the children, that she had born, he sent, and called Rachel, and Leah, to the field, unto his flock, now this is, this is no doubt, significant, he doesn't come back, to them, where they are, in the tents, and have all his servants, tongues waggy,

Jacob came away, out of the field, and he spoke to his wives, and something's up, but something's, planning here, this is getting strange, and the word gets back, the lamb, he calls them, out of the field, so that he does not, depart from his work, his flocks, and herds, can't be accused, of being dilatory, but on the other hand, he's away, from prying ears, and prying eyes, he speaks, to his wives, he's not a case, of sort of, getting their advice, but he does consult, with them, and he does see, their own view, and he does explain, the situation, to them, I see, your father's countenance, that it is not, toward me as before, but the God, of my father, hath been with me, and you know, that with all my power, I have served, your father, now they would know, the truth of that, I'm sure there's, plenty of wives, that have wished, perhaps secretly, that their husbands, would spend, a little less time, at their work, and a bit more time, at home, with them, with the family, wouldn't be quite, so diligent, in their occupation, a bit more diligent, in their family life, you know, that with all my power,

I have served, your father, and they probably, think James, well enough, you could have seen, a bit more of you, but no, you've always been out there, with the flocks, and the herds, and so on, and your father, hath deceived me, and changed my wages, ten times, that God suffered, him not to hurt me, now, the change is ten times, I don't think we need, to take the ten, as a literal, arithmetical number, it doesn't mean, he's changed it, more than nine times, but not as many, as eleven times, this is a cultural term, that means a lot of times, and it's used quite often, throughout, throughout the Old Testament, in particular, so you know, ten men, will take hold, of the skirt, of him that is a Jew, or whatever, or ten women, will bake their bread, together in the oven, and so on, and it means, a lot of people, and it means, a lot of occasions, he says, he kept changing my wages, that's what it means, he says, he changed my wages, ten times, it doesn't literally mean, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, it means several times, time after time, but God suffered him, not to

hurt me, God in other words, overruled all these things, so that every wage change, ended up working, he said, the speckled shall be thy wages, then all the cattle bear speckled, and if he said, thus the ring straight shall be thy hire, then bear all the cattle ring straight,

[15 : 34] God has seen, all these things, he recognizes, all that has been done, this is what he said, you know, when the Lord speaks to him, and he says, I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee, verse 12, and it's, I know that he's cheating you, I know that he's trying to deceive you, I'm not letting it happen, God determines, what the cattle will produce, he determines whether it will be the ring straight, or the speckled, or the grizzled, or whatever, because it is all his, it is all in his power, he says in Psalm 50, verse 10, for every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills, God is in control, of what calves, and lambs, and little kid goats they produce, he determines, what will be the nature of their offspring, he decides all these things, he has power, way beyond our knowledge, not just of the great, massive amounts of power, that move the stars, but the tiny little decisions, within the womb of each goat, or cow, or sheep, or whatever the thing may be, that he produces the young, that will enrich Jacob, he takes care for the details, of our lives, and of our work, because he had changed my wages 10 times, and they would have known that too, because what wife and family, won't enjoy the fact, that their husband, their father is getting richer, they get more money, a few more servants, and a bit more wealth, and this is nice, and then he comes home and says, my wages have been cut, or my wages have been changed,

I'm not allowed to take these cattle now, it's all been changed again, and they go, oh, so it's happened again, and this has happened before, and it happens again, and then it happens again after that, if his wives had any overriding loyalty, to their father before, then as their father seeks, to lessen their husbands, and thereby their own wealth, it's going to be reduced, and reduced, and reduced, because he has to provide, for his family, and every wage cut, or every wage change, that's going to impact, on his own wives and children, that man's own daughters, and granddaughters, that man's not really doing himself, any favours here, but, he's keeping on, trying to stay ahead of the game, he keeps on trying to change the rules, he keeps on trying to increase, his own holding, and to reduce Jacob's, but God oversees it all, God recognizes it all, Hebrews 6 verse 10, God is not unrighteous, to forget your work, and labour of love, which you have showed, toward his name, and that you've ministered, to the saints, and do minister, the Lord recognizes, what Laban has done to Jacob, yes,

Jacob was a cheat before, he was a twister, he was a deceiver, but he'd been well paid back, and more than that, by Laban, and it wasn't wrong, that the Lord, should cause Jacob, to be deceived, in the matter of his wives, God overruled that, for his own providence, it's not wrong, that Jacob should see, and learn by experience, what it is like, to deal, with a deceiver, in business, and in life, and even when it's, within your own family, it's not wrong, that Jacob should learn, by experience, this is the kind of man, I was, this is the kind of cheat, that I was, this is the kind of deceiver, I was, and this, is the effect of it, this is the misery, that it brings, but even as God, teaches him, he does so, gently, and if you are honest, and you look back, over your life, you'll see times, that the Lord, has chastised, that he has, taught you, hard, and painful lessons, in your life, but if you think about it, I am sure, you will find, that those occasions, when he did it, were occasions, when, the effects of it, were mitigated, it could have been, an awful lot worse, it could have been, an awful lot more public, you could have been, humiliated, an awful lot more, in the Lord's chastisement, but he didn't do it, that way, he kept it, comparatively discreet, comparatively quiet, if you were willing, to learn, he was willing, to teach, you had to take, his rod, and you had to learn, by his chastisement, but, it could have been, so much worse, he could have made, a complete fool of you, publicly, so many more times, but, he didn't, he doesn't desire, to grind his children, down into the mud, he does desire, to teach them, and he had to teach, Jacob, and he has to teach us, that all through it, he is having mercy upon him, and this very chastisement, this very teaching of Jacob, is becoming the means, whereby he is actually, enriched over time, just as the Lord's own chastisement, and teaching of us, is to our good, and our benefit, and yes, our enrichment, over time,

God is, in total control, of all that he does, Proverbs 13, we did it verse 42, a good man, leaveth an inheritance, to his children's children, the wealth of the sinner, is laid up, for the just, and Laban, was certainly a sinner, he was the kind of deceiver, that Jacob had been before, but his mind, and his heart, was more or less, completely in the world, he wasn't concerned, simply to get a blessing, he wasn't trying, to get a birthright, he was just trying, to enrich himself, at the expense, of his son-in-law, at the expense, of his own daughters, his own grandchildren, he didn't care, just as

long, as he got richer, and he liked Jacob, to begin with, because Jacob, made him richer, and then he didn't, like Jacob so well, because he saw that, even though Laban, was richer, Jacob was getting, even richer, and more and more, powerful, and he resented that, Laban was, at the end of the day, an idolater, and a worldly, and Jacob was compelled, to recognize, that this is the kind of person, he had been, and but for the grace of God, there he would still be, but the God of my father, hath been with me, you know, that with all my power,

[22 : 11] I have served your father, your father, hath deceived me, and changed my wages, ten times, but God suffered him, not to hurt me, and he said, the speckled, shall be thy wages, all the cattle, bear speckled, and he said, thus the ring straight, shall be thy wages, and all the cattle, bear ring straight, thus God, hath taken away, the cattle of your father, and given them to me, and it came to pass, at that time, the cattle conceived, I lifted up mine eyes, and saw in a dream, and behold, the rams, which reeked upon the cattle, were ring straight, speckled, and grizzled, and the angel of God, spake unto me, in a dream, said to Jacob, and I said, here am I, and he said, lift up now thy eyes, and see all the rams, which leap upon the cattle, are ring straight, speckled, and grizzled, for I have seen, all that Laban doeth unto thee, now it is possible, that Jacob is recounting, recalling a dream here, which he may have had, before Laban set his wages, because he was ready to go, before, if you remember, in chapter 30, he says, you know,

I've served my time, gave me my wives, and my children, and let me go, and Laban said, verse 27, of course, the previous chapter, I pray thee, if I found favour in thine eyes, tarry, that I have learned by experience, that the Lord has blessed me, for I say, appoint me thy wages, and I will give it, and this is when Jacob said, well, take me all the, all the dodgy looking ones, the ring straight, or the speckled, or the grizzled, whatever you decide, and we don't know, whether this dream, that he's referring to, was at the outset, where God was showing to him, this is what you should choose, this is what you should say, and then I will look after you, and I will bless it to you, and that Jacob used, what skill he had, as we saw at the end of chapter 30, and so he increased, and Laban didn't increase, to the same extent, and so if this is him remembering, or else if it's during the time, when Laban was changing his wages, and deciding, well, it was the ring straight before, but now it will be the speckled, or now it will be the grizzled, or now it will be the baker, or whatever it may be, Laban kept changing the rules, but every time Laban changed the rules, God would change what prospered, I have seen, all that Laban doeth unto thee, this is something, we should never forget, there is no doubt, times who might think, Lord are you seeing this, are you recognizing, what's happening to me here, I'm not doing anything, for this person, but still they're trying to be bad to me, I am not seeking, to make trouble here, but still they are doing this to me, I am suffering here, I am being ill treated, I may have done wrong, I have sinned this way, or that way, but come on, this is not deserved here, you can see, you can know, why aren't you doing anything, and the Lord does see, and the Lord does see, and the Lord does know, and the Lord does remember, and the Lord will make good, whatever may have been endured, on his account, I have seen, all that Laban doeth unto thee, and then this in verse 13, I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, now remember, when Jacob had this vision, in chapter 28, of the ladder going up to heaven, and the angels of God, ascending, and descending upon it, and the Lord, it appeared to him, saying, I am the Lord God, of Abraham my father, and the God of Isaac, the land who now lies, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed, and then the next day, when he was so afraid, of the presence of the Lord, he set up the pillar, he poured oil on the top of it, called the name of the place, of Bethel, and he was alone at that point, there was nobody with him, and God is saying, I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, in other words, I know the things, that nobody else knows, but you, you and me, we know about that anointed pillar, nobody else knows, nobody else was there, I know the things, that only your heart knows, I know the things, that only you thought, anybody saw you doing, or whether for good, or for ill, I am the God, who knows every detail, of your life, not only in church, but out and about, in your work, in your home, in your closet, out on the hill, out on the sea, I am the God, who sees every detail, of your life, where thou anointedst the pillar, whether you devote yourself, in worship, or whether you turn your back, on me, I see it, I know it, I am the God of Bethel, and the whole thing, about Bethel, is that Jacob thought, that when he got, that far away, from where his father was, that God wouldn't be, in that place, that was the whole thing, he said, surely the Lord, is in this place, and I knew it not, he didn't expect God, to be far away, from Isaac household, he didn't realise, he was a God, that filled all the heavens, and the earth, this is the God, of Bethel, where every place, where the Lord, meets with

his people, is by definition, the house of God, the gate, of heaven, where thou amountedst, the pillar, I know, what only you have done, in secret, I know, when you were there, thinking you were alone, I saw, everything that you have undertaken, and where thou bowedst, thou bow, unto me, now, some of you may know, of course, in the context, of our church's confession, of faith, there is a distinction, made in the Bible, between an oath, and a vow, an oath, is that which we make, to other people, in God's name, a vow, is a promise, made to God himself, so when people talk about, you know, ordination vows, or marriage vows, or whatever, then, a vow is only a vow, and so far, it's actually made, to God, technically, when two young people, are married, they're not, bowing to each other, they're making, promises, to each other, vows are made, only to God, thou vowedst, a vow, unto me, now, arise, get thee out, from this land, and return, unto the land, of thy kindred, this is God, speaking to him, this is God, giving his instruction,

[28 : 21] I was there, when you came, into this land, and it is I, who are now, telling you to leave, I was there, at the beginning, and I am there, at the end, and I have been there, all the time, in between, just like we mentioned, previously, about this chapter, you don't realise, in your first reading of it, or perhaps, you don't realise, in your first reading of it, that God is right through it, every second verse, God is there, every second term, or expression, the Lord, is actually in it, it's the Lord, appealing to Jacob, God who protects him, when Laban seeks, to deceive him, it is God, who puts the words, in the mouth, of Rachel, and Leah, it is the Lord, who makes them, want to disassociate, from their cheating father, and adhere to their husband, and his family, their own children, Rachel and Leah, answered and said, and is there yet any portion, or inheritance for us, in our father's house, and he said, they don't mean by that, you know, we are poor now, thanks to you, you've taken away, all our father's wealth, no, are we not counted, about strangers, he has sold us, and has quite devoured, also our money, and we mentioned, in previous weeks there, how that it would be normal, in that culture, and society, when a girl was married, to give her a dowry, and gifts, that would be her own, that would be exclusively, her own, and that would be part, of her wealth, her bride price, if you like, and the only thing, that Laban gives to them each, is he gives Zilpah, to Leah, he gives Bilhah, to Rachel, but that's really, just barely covering, you know, if he didn't even do that, and we reflect badly on him, he would look like, he was really poor, so that he couldn't afford, to give his daughters anything, he's going to tread the line, of looking like, he's a bit more generous, but not actually, costing himself, any money, he doesn't give them, any wedding present, he doesn't give them, any dowry, he doesn't give them, any wealth, to be their own, all he does, is he sells them, for seven years, of honoured labour, from Jacob, each of them, seven years, and he gives them, one made servant each, are we not counted, of him strangers, he had sold us, and the thing, you need to recognise, and remember, is that although,

Jacob loved Rachel, we don't read, that Rachel had any say, in the matter, much less, did Leah have any say, in the matter, they had to do, as they were told, by their father, they got sold, to this complete stranger, whether they wanted to, or not, God blessed them, in the end, and God recognised, the cost to themselves, as well, but they didn't get, any say in the matter, and they were obviously, discarded effectively, by their father, he had quite devoured, also our money, what should have been theirs, Laban has spent, in themselves, for all the riches, which God hath taken, from our father, that is ours, it's part of our family now, it's our children's, inheritance, that's what's laid up for us, there's nothing for us here, so whatever the Lord, has said to you, do it, and we'll be with you, and now it's good, that there's that loyalty, it's good, that there is that support, in any, any such union, where the Lord, is being served, it will only ever be, to the strength, of that marriage, or that union, or any husband, that is seeking, to obey the Lord, to know that his wife, is with them in it, that you will say, whatever the Lord, has said to you, do it, whatever it is, you feel God, is calling to you, do it, we'll be with you, through thick and thin, through all the struggles, whatever might be ahead, there's nothing for us here, if the Lord, is not in it, whatsoever God, has said unto thee, do, now it's good, that God, is mentioned here by them, but clearly, their motivation, is slightly more worldly, than Jacob's,

Jacob is seeking, to obey the Lord, they're saying, well okay, yep, God said that to you, it's fine, but you know, even from a worldly, point of view, there's nothing here for us, and quite often, God will do this, quite often, God will unite, different people, around one cause, for a variety of reasons, now if we think, for example, of the founding, of our own, denomination, in 1843, there was a whole, variety of things, that caused people, to support then, the fledgling free church, some of it was, genuinely, as we said at the time, the crown rights, of the redeemer, that King Jesus, should be

head, in his own church, and not the state, but for other people, there was plenty, of other things, just a chance, to break away, from the landlord system, or to thumb their nose, at the aristocracy, or just to have, an opportunity, to be free, of the constraints, of the old establishment, or whatever it might be, God used all these things, to make the impact, that he did then, all of these things, holy motives, and spiritual motives, combining with, let's say, less spiritual motives, and perhaps, Rachel and Leah, here have, less spiritual motives, but the end result, of that, is that wives, and children together, are 100% behind Jacob, whatever their motive, may be, they are with them, and he knows, that when he goes, they all go with him, and they all go with him, supporting him, 100%, then Jacob rose up, and sent his sons, and his wives, upon camels, and carried away, all his cattle, and all his goods, which he had gotten, the cattle of his getting, which he had gotten, in Paddan Aram, for to go to Isaac, his father, in the land of Canaan, 20 years, after he left, now he's seeking, to go home, now remember, at the time when he left, Isaac was talking, as though he was about to die, and yet, we know that Isaac, was nowhere near dying, at this point, Jacob is ready, to come home now, and go back, to his father Isaac, his mother, had originally said, you know, go away for a few days, till Esau's wrath, you know, calms down, about 20 years later, Jacob is still anxious, maybe that's one reason, why he didn't go home, without the Lord's, express teaching, so he set them all, in camels, and Laban, went to shear his sheep, that's a big occasion, to these pastoral people, of course, the sheep shearing, the big celebratory event, gathering in of all, the wool, which would then, of course, be what could be sold, and made into clothing, and so on, so it's a big deal, the sheep shearing, so it'd be a big, sort of party occasion, so he knows, he'll be occupied, for a while, there's three days journey, between him, and Laban, that is what Laban, had decided, if you look back, the previous chapter, verse 35, he removed that day, the he goats, that were ring-streaked, and spotted, and all the she goats, that were speckled, and spotted, and everyone, that had some white in it, and all the brown, among the sheep, gave them into the hand, of his sons, that's Laban's sons, and he set, three days journey, betwixt himself, and Jacob, and Jacob fed, the rest of Laban's flocks, Jacob is not taking, anything, that doesn't belong, to him, he's not taking, anything of Laban's, own flocks, he's taking, only that, which he had gotten, in Paddan Aram, that's what it says there, verse 18, all his goods, which he had gotten, the cattle of his getting, which he had gotten, in Paddan Aram, it's his own stuff, he's taking, he's leaving Laban's behind, which means, he must be leading, somebody with them, whether some of Laban's servants, or some of his own, junior servants, to mine the flocks, and that's how, the word then, gets back, to Laban, because we are told, it was told Laban, on the third day, verse 22, that Jacob was fled, that means, the minute Jacob left, somebody set off, to go and tell Laban, so much, for local loyalty, he knew, that as soon as he went, the word would go, but the reason, it takes three days, is that Laban, has himself, put three days journey, between Jacob, and his own flocks, to protect, his own interests, now, it's coming back, to bite him, from behind,

[36 : 29] Jacob stole away, unawares, to Laban the Syrian, or as the original Hebrew, would have it, he stole away, his heart, taking his daughters, and his grandchildren, and so on, but Rachel, had stolen the images, that were her father's, verse 19, now there's various, possible interpretations, of this, it's perhaps, no surprise, that Laban, made use of these, what were called, teraphim, is the original term, and it means, little household gods, in the shape, of human figures, some people think, that they were meant, to represent ancestors, others, that they were, simply little local gods, in addition, to the bigger gods, that people might worship, which were consulted, by you know, by families, about different decisions, to be taken, or journeys, they should take, or whatever, and this kind of, lesser idolatry, was widespread, in that part of the world, at that time, throughout the world, at that time, idolatry was right, and we might speculate, that perhaps, Rachel was taking them, simply because, she liked them, maybe because, she was particularly, attached, to these particular images, and so she wanted them, for her own, so she took them with her, or perhaps, she knew that Laban, would consult the images, and that perhaps, he would consult them, about the decision, whether or not, to chase Jacob, and so she wanted, to take away, that opportunity, so they'd have more, of a head start, perhaps, or perhaps, she just wanted, the silver and the gold, of them, which they tended, to be made out of, perhaps, or the kindest, interpretation is, she wanted to let, her father understand, that there was no future, in these foolish idols, and therefore, that she should take them, and just take temptation, out of his way, now that has been, the interpretation of some, it is perhaps, a little over generous, as an interpretation, one reason we say that, is that if we go ahead, to chapter 35, we see at verse 2,

Jacob said to his household, and to all that were with him, put away the strange gods, that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments, and let us arise, and go up to Bethel, now that means, that he knows, that some people, in his household, use these little strange gods, it's almost certain, that nobody would have been allowed, to bring those gods, into his tents, into his household, while he was, knowledgeably in charge, which almost certainly means, it's got to be somebody, who reckons, they can get their way, with them, it's not a servant, it's almost certainly, one of the wives, and the one, who's going to melt his heart, and be able to do, whatever they want, pretty much, is Rachel, so almost certainly, Rachel is, continuing to use, these gods, or these idols, or at least, others in her household, or family are, this is why,

Jacob at chapter 35, has to say, put them away, that's enough, no more idolatry now, it is no surprise, that those who have been steeped, in idolatry, should continue in it, but there's no justification, for the stealing either, Rachel had stolen the images, that were her father's, and Jacob stole away, unawares to live on the city, so he fled, with all that he had, and rose up, and passed over the river, now it says the river, it means the Euphrates, whenever the Old Testament, uses the term, just the river, without any other, you know, naming, or any other title, or token, to it, it means, the river Euphrates, the great river, and we look back, to chapter 15, where God is speaking, to Abraham, he says, that it will be, the country, that he will rule, verse 18, in the same day, the Lord made a covenant, with Abraham saying, unto thy seed, am I given this land, from the river of Egypt, that is the border, the body of Egypt, not the Nile, but the one that borders, with the holy land, unto the great river, the river Euphrates, so he crossed the Euphrates, from Hanan, all the way down then, into Mount Gilead, and it was told,

Laban on the third day, and he took his brethren, with him, pursued after him, seven days journey, and he overtook him, in Mount Gilead, now, would Laban have spent, seven days traveling, to go and visit, his dearest friend, would he have gone, visiting with, you know, pleasantness, with joy, to something, for seven days, no, he hasn't budged, from where he is, trying to build up, his business, in all that time, but now, when he's got vengeance, on his mind, seven days journey, he's going, tailing after Jacob, to try and catch him, and no doubt, to try and reclaim, all that he has, and God, came to Laban, the Syrian, in a dream by night, and said, I'm going to take heed, that I speak not to Jacob, either good, or bad, now this, is a Hebrewism, it's a term, an expression, it doesn't mean, you know, literally, be silent, zip your lips, don't say a thing, it's a term, an expression, that would be understood, to mean, just be careful, what you say, don't try and influence it, either with flattery, on the one hand, or with threats, on the other hand, you've got a less, a less hostile expression, of it in chapter 24, remember, when Abraham's servant, went to ask, for Rebecca's hand, and we read that,

Laban and Bethuel, chapter 24, verse 50, answered and said, the thing proceedeth, from the Lord, we cannot speak unto thee, bad or good, in other words, we can't make any influence, it's not, that's it, we're not going to say a word, to you guys, from now on, everything's going to be done, in silence, it just means, we cannot influence, this outcome, we cannot change, what God has decided, and this is what, the Lord is saying, take heed, that thou speak not to Jacob, either good or bad, don't try and flatten him back, or cajole him, don't try and threaten him, or take away what is his, you are not going to influence, this Laban, I've allowed you to chase him, I've allowed you to catch up, with him, and I've got my own reasons, for this, but you are not going to change, what God, has decided, now for us, this is the final lesson, perhaps, of this passage tonight, that there is that, which we may do, whether in a rage, or whether, in our own strength, or seeking to follow, our own ambitions, and the Lord, will allow us, to go so far, and no further, there is that, which God himself, has decreed, and decided, and we will be allowed, to go so far, and no further, what we ought to seek, for our good, and seek, for our own progress, and our own blessing, and our own help, is that we should seek, that our will, be in line with his, so that we do not, come to a dead stop, we are not brought, to a halt, by the Lord, saying thus far, and no further,

[43 : 26] I've let you go thus far, but this is where it ends, my will, is not going to be changed, God's will, is not going to be changed, but we can continue, to progress, continue to develop, and be blessed, if our will, is in line, with his will, if we pitch, our will against God's, there's no doubt, about what happens, when they, if you like, the unstoppable force, encounters the immovable object, God is not going to be moved, God is not going to be changed, it is we, who must back off, but if our will, is in line with his, if we seek, to be obedient, and faithful, and loving to him, there is no end, to the blessing, and to the future, which he has laid up, for them that love him, seek, like Jacob, that we be obedient, to the Lord, not jumping the gun, not running ahead, of ourselves, but not delaying, when

God has given us, our orders, he will cause things, to combine, so that for whatever, the variety, of motivation, the Lord will give us, the strength, and the unity, to proceed together, but at the end of the day, if we go up against the Lord, we will go thus far, and no further, if we go with the Lord, there is no end, to the blessing, that he will have, in store, let us pray.