

TORAHSCOPE: VaYetze (And he went out)

by Mark Huey posted 16 November, 2007 www.outreachisrael.net

Genesis 28:10-32:3
Hosea 12:12-14:10(g)

“Laban Laborers”

“Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You” (Genesis 28:20-22).

VaYetze is a Torah portion that most people can identify with if they have spent any time working for others. Sadly, the world is full of people who are driven by the spirit of Laban. Those who make promises and conveniently forget to honor them are all over the world. Human nature is such that interchanges, like those between Laban and his son-in-law Jacob, are fairly common around the globe. People make promises that are easily broken because the consequences of broken vows do not necessarily surface immediately.

But before we recall all that has been done to us by the fracturing of pledges, it would probably be beneficial to first recollect all of the promises we have personally dishonored. It is easy to point a finger at those who twist the truth and have selective memories about their commitments, but what about our own vows that are uttered in the quieter moments of life? How about those simple promises to read the Bible, pray consistently, stop smoking or drinking, stop overeating, get more exercise, help one's neighbors, put others' needs ahead of mine, or love my wife as the Messiah loves the *ekklēsia*? The list could go on and on. We have all made these types of promises to ourselves, to our spouses, to our children, or to our Creator. The problem is that it is much easier to examine the speck in our brother's eye, rather than work to remove the log that clouds our own vision of our true self.

“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye” (Matthew 7:1-5).

Before we remove our brother's speck, let us see what we can learn from how Jacob deals with the challenges of having “the” real Laban for his father-in-law, and remove any logs that might exist. Is it possible that God gave Jacob a father-in-law just like Laban to work out some issues in his life? Is it also possible that He has given each of us our own “Laban-like” experiences in order to mold us into useful servants for His purposes? This is why self-examination can be so fruitful. In His economical ways, God orders all of life's circumstances so that His people can benefit from the trials and admonishments that surface. Remember that one of the benefits of being a child of the living God described in Hebrews guarantees that He will discipline and admonish us using a variety of means:

“You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, ‘MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.’ It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us for our good*, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems

not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (Hebrews 12:4-11).

The Power of Words

Remember how critical words are spoken from *Toldot*. Jacob made sure that Esau verbally swore to relinquish his birthright (Genesis 25:33), and the birthright promises were transferred eternally. Isaac, once he spoke the blessing over Jacob, was unable to rescind his words of blessing upon the younger (Genesis 27:33), and the blessings have flowed ever since to Jacob's seed rather than the seed of the elder Esau. These are two great examples of how powerful our words are, and how our utterances can become vows, promises, pledges, blessings, or curses. They have an incredible impact on us and those to whom the statements are directed.

Jacob understood this principle about the "power of words," having grown up in the tents of his parents Isaac and Rebekah, and hearing about his grandfather Abraham. He knew that the Most High had visited his fathers at different times and imparted some very powerful verbal promises to them. In audible and visual encounters, the Holy One had promised a multitude of descendants to each of them, and the very Land of Canaan and beyond as an inheritance for their progeny. You can imagine Jacob's reaction as he was fleeing from Esau's anger, when he had a dream-vision at Bethel. Here, as his head was resting on a rock, he dreamt about seeing a ladder with angels ascending and descending from Heaven. Then, the presence of the Almighty spoke these confirming words to Jacob in the dream:

"And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, 'I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you'" (Genesis 28:13-15).

What was Jacob's response to this exhilarating experience? He woke up and began to utter all kinds of statements and declarations. He took up the stone pillow, renamed the town, and uttered this recorded vow to God:

"Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You'" (Genesis 28:20-22).

As you can imagine, this was a very exciting interchange for Jacob. He had clearly been in the presence of God Himself, and his actions indicated a real change of heart. His vow reveals a sincere desire to be dependent upon the God of his fathers who had just appeared to him in a dream. But did you notice the "if/then" aspect of the vow? Jacob tells God, "If you give me everything, then you will be my God." This sounds like he is still bargaining and expecting the Most High to perform, before he gives Him the allegiance He requires. To top it off, consider the relative stinginess of only offering 10% of all that is given?

You could conclude that if one has all of his needs supplied, protection from enemies, and relative peace in his father's house, that one might be willing to give back more than just 10%. How about 20% or maybe even 50%? The problem is this: the Lord requires 100%. Anything less than this and one falls from the ranks of the chosen. The call becomes more like an announcement that is available for all to respond to in kind. Remember, "many are called but few are chosen." Certainly, you probably recall this statement, but do you recollect the context of when Yeshua said it? God was calling all to the wedding feast of His Son in the Kingdom to come:

"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. Again he sent out other slaves saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are *all* butchered and

everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.” But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire. Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find *there*, invite to the wedding feast.’ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests. But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?’ And the man was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few *are* chosen” (Matthew 22:2-14).

In this parable Yeshua instructs His Disciples that you must be attentive to the situation at hand. When you are invited to a wedding feast, dress like you are a part of the feast. If you plan to show up without any real concern for the feast, then you are subject to horrendous retribution. If you are only allowing a percentage of your being to attend (10% or 20%, or maybe even 50%), then you are subject to not understanding the dress code. This could have tragic consequences for your life.

What Jacob will discover in ensuing chapters is that only partial commitment to the Lord is not sufficient. Jacob will come to a place where he realizes that apart from Him, he can do nothing (Genesis chs. 32-33). Absolute dependence upon God for not only provision and protection, but life itself, allows one to transcend to a place of usefulness in the work of the Kingdom here on Earth. Only when Jacob is confronted with the possible slaughter of his family and his own death by the estranged Esau, is he finally willing to concede his lack of strength and cleverness in his own abilities to the Lord.

At this critical juncture in his walk, albeit with a limp, he humbly approaches Esau to receive whatever Esau determines to do. Even though he has taken some precautions for the survival of at least part of his family, he is placing 100% of his life in the hands of his brother, who decades before he had robbed of his birthright and the blessings of their father Isaac. Jacob, through the literal and figurative, wrestles with the Most High and his tools (Laban), had finally come to a place where he was depending on Him for all things:

“But he himself passed on ahead of them and bowed down to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother” (Genesis 33:3).

Are we at that point in our lives where the Laban experiences convict us about the dark secrets we may carry? Have we gotten to the point where we are dependent upon the Lord for everything? Do we give Him 10% or 100% of all that we have to give?

Vows Allow

Have you made vows to the Lord that have not been kept? Do you even remember all of your commitments to not only Him, but other promises made over the years? If we would all be absolutely honest, we could probably all remember commitments made that have not been met. By remembering these things, perhaps we can begin to extend some mercy to the Labans of our lives who have had a larger purpose than just exemplifying ways we should not walk. Instead, if we view these experiences through the Father’s eyes, we might be able to understand that He is using the conniving and cajolery to get our attention. He might even want to have us practice extending mercy and grace and love to those who mistreat us. We do have some serious challenges in life when we are asked to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us:

“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous” (Matthew 5:44-45).

Contemplate these words spoken by Yeshua in His Sermon on the Mount. Consider the reward for loving and praying for your enemies and those who persecute you. You will be sons of

your Father in Heaven. Imagine how tough it is for Him to stomach all the things He witnesses on Earth, and still each day the Lord allows the sun to rise on all mankind, in spite of all the wretched sin that He knows abounds unabated. After all, is He not attempting to conform us to the image of His Son Yeshua?

Was He not, in ages past, trying to get Jacob to be more like His fathers Isaac and Abraham? Was not faith the critical component that set Abraham apart from his peers? Is he not the father of the faithful? Should we not be more faithful, even though we have the tendency to be like Jacob, or even Laban?

Rather than critique the works of our personal Labans, maybe we should pray for them and love them, so that the Father's love for them would shine through us. It is possible that the Father is working on the Labans of the world and using us as His representatives, so that none will perish? The Apostle Peter admonishes us, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

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