

Dr. Kenneth Mathews, Genesis, Session 18, Jacob and Laban, Genesis 29-31

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This is Dr. Kenneth Mathews in his teaching on the book of Genesis. This is session 18, Jacob and Laban, Genesis chapters 29 through 31.

Today, we're looking at Jacob and Laban and their relationship in Paddan Aram, where Jacob fled from his household to Beersheba in chapter 29 to the household of his family, his mother's brother, Rebecca's brother Laban.

And really, what you could think of is how these three chapters, 29, 30, and 31, are marked on the outside by fleeing. In the case of chapter 29, he flees from his brother Esau, who is out to kill him. Then, in chapter 31, he flees from his uncle Laban because of the oppression that he experiences there.

So instead of it becoming a better arrangement, we will find that it becomes all the more destructive in Jacob's experiences. You can think of chapter 29 then as describing his entrance into Paddan Aram, in particular the town of Haran. And then in chapter 31, he plans to leave.

In chapter 30, in between the two is the pivot. In that chapter, there's a description of his increase in children and also his increase in herds and flocks. Now the background is so important for understanding these chapters.

We can read that in chapter 31. And you can look with me in chapter 31, where we hear God speaking. And he says in verse 13, I am the God of Bethel.

You remember in chapter 28, where God revealed himself to Jacob in a dream. Remember the stairway that connected heaven and earth and the ascending and descending angels. Bethel, as you know, was named the house of God and became a place of religious importance, not only in the lives of the patriarchs but throughout Israel's history.

So, he says in 13, I am the God of Bethel where you anointed a pillar. Remember that he took the stone either under his head or beside his head where he lay to sleep. And, uh, he set it up as a pillar, a place of, uh, recognition of God's presence and then continuing and where you made a vow to me, this was a vow of faith, trusting that upon his return to Bethel that he would give himself and give of his resources in worship to Yahweh, the God of Bethel.

And finishing out verse 13, now leave this land and go back to your native land. So, this is the background for understanding what will occur in chapter 28. We have the

first occasion in scripture that recalls the now personal, uh, relationship that will begin to develop with God.

He identifies God as the God of his fathers. He recognizes the promises that had been made to Abraham and to his father, Isaac, but he had not known God personally out of his own experience. But now he begins that experience with God, and it will develop and grow, as we see in his difficult circumstances in the town of Haran.

Now, when we look at these chapters, things turn worse, not better. One would think, okay, he's developing this relationship with God. Promises have been made.

He's going to go to the city of Haran. He's going to have these experiences where he will have a wife and children and be enriched. And after a bit, thought Rebecca, his wife, rather his mother, he'll come back and we will see the promises being realized.

But that's not the case at all. What happens is that there is deception upon deception. And just as we saw in the womb between Jacob and Esau, where there was a struggle, we'll find that there is a struggle now between Jacob and Laban and competition between Leah and Rachel.

And then there's going to his two wives, and then there's going to be a struggle between the daughters and their father, Laban. So happily, however, it'll end in a peace treaty in chapter 31, verse 32. So, we do have tension here.

And the tension, unlike with Jacob and, excuse me, Abraham and Isaac, where there was the tension of procreation, we will find that Jacob will have many children. Procreation is not the problem. And he will become very wealthy.

But where is the problem? The problem is he's not in the land. And God has promised in chapter 28, the dream of Bethlehem, that he will return him. And so, we will find that God speaks to Jacob and says, now it is time for you to return.

How much time has there been? Well, there's been 20 years, seven years for his first wife, Leah, seven years of work to pay wages for Rachel, his second wife. And then six years for watching the flocks of what we find for Laban. And this is reported by Jacob, who speaks of this.

And he begins speaking of this when he talks to Rachel and Leah in chapter 31. And he says to them in verse five, I see that your father's attitude toward me is not what it was before. Now, it's becoming increasingly hostile.

The tension between these two is rising. But the God of my father has been with me. And so, he's expressing his faith and trust in the Lord despite all of these hurdles and mistreatment by Laban.

God will show himself to be faithful. Beginning again in six, you know that I've worked for your father with all my strength. The problem was not that he failed in the assignments, but the arrangement that he had with Laban regarding Laban's daughters and then continuing to work.

Yeah, during those six additional years, overseeing Laban's flocks. Yet, he says in verse seven, your father has cheated me by changing my wages 10 times. 10 is probably the word that reflects the number that reflects the idea of completeness or wholeness.

However, God has not allowed him to harm me. So, you see, again, that he's placing his trust and faith in the Lord to intercede on his behalf, in accord with God's promise. Verse eight: if your father said the speckled ones will be your wages, then all the flocks gave birth to speckled young.

And if he said the striped ones would be your wages, then all the flocks bore striped young. So, God has taken away your father's livestock and has given them to me. So again, there is an interpretation of what is transpiring on the basis that God has been taking care of the arrangement between the two.

Then if you will look with me in chapter 31, where we have then another description. In this time, Jacob is speaking to Laban and explaining to him how faithful and diligent he has been to Laban. And yet Laban mistreated him by deceiving him.

We'll pick that up when he says in verse 41, I did what was right. It was like this, he says, for the 20 years I was in your household. And in the previous sentences, he talked about how he was ensuring that the sheep and goats he watched were cared for by wild animals and how he worked diligently for Laban. Whether it was in times of heat or cold day or night, he was on duty, and he saw that his duty was carried out.

So, returning to 41 verse 41, I worked for you 14 years for your two dollars and six years for your wages or my wages 10 times. So, the 20 years were spent in arduous labor. But yet he emerges with God's blessing and oversight.

A wealthy man, a man of such reputation and wealth, becomes a man who is envied. The jealousy of Laban's sons is such that it is time for him to leave while the leaving is good. Now, what we find in the experiences, there are always difficulties and disappointments, threats and hostilities. And on the part of the patriarchs themselves, we see that they are failing in their faithfulness.

They're failing at times in their morality. And really, if we were to pick a family that God would use for good, it seems that Abraham's family would not be taken as a serious candidate. And why would God then continue to pour out blessing upon blessing, not

rewarding them for their iniquity but rather tolerating their iniquity to the degree that he would still be able to work with them as a vessel of blessing for all people groups?

So, what we have here is God's superintending, God's working out, showing the promises, showing that it is not dependent upon the patriarchs. If it were dependent upon the patriarchs, we would have never started the plan. But it was because of God's strength in goodness and blessing for all peoples that he could, in his wisdom, in his grace, in his mercies, carry out this plan.

As a consequence, not only were the descendants of Abraham enriched by God in God's presence, but as you continue to read the great history that's found in the Old Testament, it will speak to how this people group will be a vehicle of God's plan for all peoples. This is hinted at, and then it is illustrated in the Old Testament, which comes to a delightful consummation in the descendants of Abraham, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Now, when you look at these various events, such as what we find in chapters 29, 30, and 31, you can say to yourself, what a terrible dysfunctional family.

And they were, no question about it. And you can say, how terrible is this for the way that the patriarchs and those related to them suffer? They suffer all kinds of sinful planning, deception, wickedness, and things of that sort. But what we will find is, as I was just saying, God, can still use this to mold and make Jacob a man of greater faith and a deeper and more intensive relationship with God.

And this is so very important for us to remember that we don't want to take one experience in the life of the patriarchs or any experience in the Old Testament, or the New Testament for that matter, and isolate it from the larger narrative story. It is in the context of the larger narrative story, the higher purposes of God, the hopeful reality, and the realizing the future of God's plan that we have in these disappointing events, meaning, meaning because it's set in the bigger framework. In isolation, it is misinterpreted.

It could be interpreted as a failure on the part of God. Suffering and shame could be interpreted as abandonment as a result of God. It could be interpreted wrongly as the way in which God has lied or that he just doesn't have the will and ability to carry out the plans.

So, there can be all kinds of misunderstandings unless you put this in the larger framework. And so, I would say to you, the New Testament speaks the same, how God uses various challenges in our lives, but yet for the good of taking us, these

incidents in our lives and putting it in the bigger framework of what God is doing with the good purpose of transforming us and deepening us in our relationship with him through his son, Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit. And so there is the joy and the optimism that we have in Christ Jesus, as was true of the patriarchs when they became focused on the positive relationship that God was showing them.

He is showing himself, wanting to be seen, revealing himself time and time and time again to reinforce and to encourage faithfulness and diligence. And we as Christians, too, must remember that the events in our lives are not ones that have no purpose or no means, that it's not a matter of what you might call happenstance. No, what we must remember is, as Paul says in the New Testament in his Corinthian correspondence, that he has experienced sorrow yet joyful.

So even in the midst of sorrow, there can be a joyfulness on the part of Christians because we know that the plan of God has become realized in our Lord Jesus Christ, and more is to come. And that is what gives us the permanency of our faith and joy. Well, let's look then a little deeper.

Laban deceives Jacob in chapter 29. And so, we're told that Jacob comes to Paddan Aram, and there he finds and comes upon a well. And this is going to have echoes of Abraham's servant who went to the same location.

There was a well there, and that's where he met the wife of Isaac, the mother of Jacob. And so, you'll remember that it was Jacob's, rather it was Rebecca, who watered the servant of Abraham and also watered his fox. Well, in this case, it's going to be reversed.

It is Jacob who rolls away the stone from the well and provides the water that is needed for Rachel and her sheep because she is a shepherd as well. So, this is the kind of echo that you will be finding repeatedly throughout the story. These many allusions to Abraham, as a result, show us that God has a successor to Abraham and Isaac, and that is going to be as was foretold in chapter 25 in the womb incident where it is said that the older will serve the younger and that there is underway God making good on his promises.

Then we have this reversal, and it develops into a happy reception. And that's what we find in verse 14 when he declares regarding Jacob, his nephew, and he says in verse 14, you are my own flesh and blood. So here is a kinship that should lead to a positive outcome, a happy relationship.

But as we see, Laban is a real match when it comes to Jacob. Now we see the deceiver Jacob becomes the deceived repeatedly. And so, we have strife in the family and it's within the strife of the family, as we've seen on earlier occasions, that there is a threat regarding the promises.

It's the greater threat to the land and the return to the land. Well, we are told that Jacob loved Rachel. So, there is a romance feature found here, and you'll pick it up in

verse 18.

Jacob was in love with Rachel, and here is his offer. You have to remember now that Jacob did not have any wealth to provide for purchasing Rachel in a way that is commercial, yet based on a relationship, not a crude purchase that you might think of, but rather a bridal price is involved. So here is his best offer.

I'll work for you for seven years in return for your younger daughter, Rachel. And at the end of the seven years, we're told in verse 20 that they seemed to him like only a few days because of his love for her. And so, the seven years, he saw the reward, not the various difficulties that went with working for Laban for seven years.

Now, the tradition in Haran evidently was the older daughter was to be married first and the younger daughter later. And so, Laban tricked Jacob by giving him a feast for the wedding, but substituting on the night of consummation Leah instead of Rachel. And of course, a common question is, why in the world did he not know that this was indeed Leah instead of Rachel? Well, a feast would have alcoholic beverages, and he may have been drunk or slightly drunk and then in a darkened tent.

And then Leah may well have been in night clothing. But the point is, in the passage, we aren't told precisely how that would occur, but it was only in the morning that he realizes he has married Leah and he has been deceived. In verse 25, Laban explains the custom and then he makes another arrangement with Jacob.

And that is after this week, the wedding festival week, then I will give you Rachel, but you must work seven more years. Another seven years, we are told in verse 30. So this is what occurs.

He has two wives, Leah and Rachel, and Rachel expresses the importance of bearing children in chapter 30. When Rachel saw, in verse one, that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, give me children or I'll die.

It seemed that, at that time, a woman's purpose was to bear children and ensure inheritance and a legacy. It also ensured the woman's future security that her grown sons would be able to care for her. So, we find in verse 31 again, and going back to chapter 29, that the Lord has pity and shows mercy toward Leah, recognizing that Leah was not loved.

He opened her womb and gave her children. And that is what created this envy, this competition for the two of them, Leah and Rachel. Now, we find in chapter 30, that a

means of increasing children was to give, as we saw in the case with Abraham and Hagar, a maidservant to birth additional children to a person.

And so, this is the case for Leah and her maidservant, Bilhah, or rather, I should say, Rachel's maidservant, Bilhah, who will have children. And then for Leah, it's her maidservant, Zilpah, who bore children, and they are named. I want to reiterate, as we see in this chapter, that there is a full understanding that even though some local folklore, folk custom comes into play, that they still understand ultimately it is God who brings about the children.

So, you can see this in chapter 30, verse 2, Jacob became angry with Rachel and said, am I in the place of God? So, he does understand that it is ultimately God's decision, not his. So, when Rachel says to him, give me children, or I'll die, he angrily replies, it's not within my power to give you children. It depends upon the Lord who gives children.

And so, we find this struggle that ensues. And as Rachel says in verse 8, then Rachel said I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won because Bilhah has had children. If you wanted to compute just on the basis of who had more children than the other, you will find that Leah has six sons and one daughter, Dinah, who will be important later in the story.

And then Zilpah, her maidservant, has two sons. So that's eight sons in all. Rachel will have two sons, one of which will be birthed once they return to the land.

And then her maidservant, Bilhah, will have two sons. So, the totality, there's four sons. And when you put it all together, those 12 sons, according to Jacob, become the progenitors of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Now, you do have this strange occurrence of using an aphrodisiac, or at least what was believed to be an aphrodisiac. And this is the mandrake. And evidently, there was a tradition that eating the fruit of the mandrake would result in more children being born.

So, the two scheming women there, you see how desperate they are. They believe that God is responsible. Ultimately, they nonetheless attempt to manipulate, to sidetrack God by manipulating Jacob through the mandrake.

The mandrake was a, as I said, a yellow-red fruit in the springtime. And what was striking about it was that its roots of the mandrake plant was like the lower torso of a human being, of a man. And that might have been suggested then as to an aphrodisiac.

But look what the narrator says in chapter 30, verse 24, where she names her own pregnant birth. His name is Joseph. Joseph is related to the idea of addition or addition.

And so, Rachel says in verse 24, may Yahweh, that's the faithful covenant name of the Lord, his personal name, may the Lord add to me another son. So, there is a recognition on their part of correct theology, and yet they are not willing to trust the Lord altogether. Now, we move on to this chapter on how Jacob builds his own flock.

And so, we move to the addition of children, Joseph, and now to the addition and the increase of flocks. So, this is Laban's response. We're going to have now the dual continuing between Laban and Jacob.

So, he says, that is Jacob, he says, it's time for me to leave. Look at all I've done. Now give me my wives and children, and I'll be off.

But Laban said to him in verse 27, look, let's make another deal. And he actually brings God into the picture by divination, he says. And by divination, he means to discover hidden knowledge through some sort of mechanical means.

And so, the Lord has blessed me because of you. Do you remember how this was the case when it came to Abimelech, the king of Gerar, because of the favor that was shown toward Abraham and then Isaac that God showed and demonstrated? Then Abimelech, in each case, wanted to be associated.

He wanted to have a treaty, a relationship with the favored Abraham and Isaac. And that's what we find here. I see, he says, in verse 27, that the Lord has blessed me because of you.

So, you see the idea there again; it's not as clear, but it is implied. Whoever blesses you, Abraham, I will bless. Whoever curses you, I will curse.

And simply because of the relationship by birth, by connection, by association, that Laban will benefit. Now, this will be turned upside down because of Laban's mistreatment of Jacob. So, we see this again taking place in verses 29 through 30.

Jacob says, you know, I've worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care. The little you had before I came has increased greatly. And the Lord has blessed you wherever I have been.

So now it's time for me to do my own, build up my own house, build up my own flocks. And the way that this will be arranged is an agreement between the two and Laban thinking himself, the master manipulator, goes about to ensure in his mind

that the offer he makes to Jacob, or they make an arrangement, is such that he will have the upper hand. So, let's see what is the arrangement.

Jacob says I don't want you to give me anything. I don't want you to enrich me. You can see this reminds you of Abraham and the king of Sodom in chapter 14, where the king of Sodom wanted to give Abraham the spoils, the booty from the great victory that Abraham led against that eastern coalition of warriors that he chased down and defeated.

But Abraham said I will be enriched by God. I will not be enriched by you, the king of Sodom, as a Canaanite king. So that's in mind here when he says, all I want is while I'm overseeing your flocks, I will remove from them speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-colored lamb, and every spotted or speckled goat.

That will be my wages. Well, Laban agreed to that, and then he set about to undo that agreement. He sends his sons into the flocks.

He removes those particularly described animals, and then he sets between his flocks and what was left for Jacob, a three-day journey. So, there will not be any kind of crossbreeding that would occur. Now, what Jacob does is that he follows, again, another folk custom, and he takes branches from trees and peels back, we are told in verse 37, the bark, exposing the white underlying wood of the branch.

So you would have this alternation between the bark and the white, the bark and the white. And then he would set about by setting these over the water troughs so that when the animals that he did have would come to drink, and then the female in heat, there would be a mating between the two, breeding between the two, and from them would come, like the branches, the alternating colors. So, then, what would come from the breeding would be those particularly described animals that would be Jacob's reward: the speckled, the spotted, and then the dark animals.

And this is what occurred. And so, we find in verse 43 of chapter 30, in this way, the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks and maidservants and menservants and camels and donkeys. So that's a summary of all the wealth that he had accumulated, not just the flocks, but also other animals and a large household.

So, what we must understand, of course, is that God again used, as he did with the mandrakes, this folk custom. He accepted it. He worked with their limited knowledge, even their thought of how to manipulate in order to secure their wealth.

He used that knowledge, nevertheless, to accomplish his purposes because his purposes were a long-range, not a short purpose, a shortened goal, but a long-range goal. So, this is a tremendous act of God's grace and mercy toward Jacob and his

family. Now, in light of all of this that has occurred, where there's been a great increase, procreation of children, and then there's been a great increase of his wealth, we find in chapter 31 a change in attitude, just like the herdsmen that were in struggle with the herdsmen of Abraham, Lot's herdsmen in chapter 13, and then in the case with Isaac's wealth and the herdsmen of King Abimelech, of Gerar.

There was tension there. Why is this tension developing in each of these scenarios? Because there's a limitation of grazing land and there's a limitation of water. And so there was a struggle that would take place between these various groups.

In chapter 31, verse 1, Jacob heard Laban's sons saying, Jacob has taken everything our father owned and has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father. In verse 2, Jacob notices that Laban's attitude toward him is not what it had been. Now, Jacob is going to have to convince his wives and their children to accompany him, to go to a land that they had not known, and to trust that Jacob was indeed being led with the wisdom of God.

And they were going to leave their father's household. And so, he begins in verse 3 to give them his explanation of why they must go. And he makes it quite clear, doesn't he? We've read these verses before, that it was Laban who had cheated him.

And even though they were going to sneak away, steal away, deceive Laban, it was the best way they could ensure a safe departure because he did not know what Laban would do. So was the potential of Laban and his herdsmen. And if you look at verse 20, it says this: Jacob deceived Laban, the Aramean.

Laban lives in this region, Aram, and so they're identified by that connection as Arameans. And they did speak Aramaic, I should say Aramaic, by not telling him he was running away. So, what did he do? Verse 21, he fled with all he had, crossing the Euphrates westward, and that's the river, and he headed for the hill country of Gilead, which is in a region northeast of the Sea of Galilee.

So, he's moving, approaching the land of Canaan. And so, we find that he describes in verse 10 of chapter 31, a dream. And we will find repeatedly these dreams that come to pass, and this is the means by which God speaks to the patriarchs, as well as even those who are not of the appointed seed and promise of God.

And so, we know this is the case in chapter 20, where Abraham and Abimelech have this relationship where Abraham lied to Abimelech, but Abimelech, regarding his wife, you remember that wife-daughter deceit, but Abimelech has a dream. And we're going to find that Laban is going to have a dream. And this occurs in verse 24.

Then God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream at night and said to him, be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad. So, dreams are critically important,

and they are a means of affirming that this is indeed God who is speaking. So, in verse 10, I once had a dream, and the dream describes the mating of the animals that are streaked, speckled, or spotted, and we can assume also that are colored ones.

Verse 11 says, the angel of God, and again, repeatedly, angels are engaged in the work of God and in the lives of the patriarchs. And so, he speaks this angel, and he says in verse 13 that the angel identifies himself as God. I am the God of Bethel.

So, the angel of God is evidently some kind of manifestation of God's very presence. Now, the women are easily convinced to accompany them; they have to be co-conspirators with Jacob. And they explain in verses 14 through 16, why it is that they are in agreement to go along with Jacob.

And that is because their father has not treated them rightly, justly, as they should be as daughters, but rather he's treated them as outsiders, foreigners. And so, we have not received anything from our father's inheritance, his estate. He's giving it on to his sons.

We haven't received any of it. So, they interpret what has occurred is the miraculous, unexpected, remarkable intervention of God to ensure they will get what is due them. Verse 16, where it says, surely are the wealth that God took away from our father belongs to us and our children.

So do whatever God has told you. And so, as we have already read, he fled. Now what's important before we move on is what occurs in verse 19, when Laban had gone to shear his sheep.

So, he is preoccupied with that. He's many days away from keeping an eye on Jacob. We are told that Rachel stole her father's household gods.

And this becomes a deception not only of Laban, but also of Jacob, because Jacob is not aware of the thievery of these household gods. Now, the household gods, we don't know precisely the significance that they have. But we do know that household gods and estral gods were ones that could be used as an assurance of an inheritance if you possess the household gods.

This may be what's happening in Israel as well as in the nations of the ancient Near East. But it's only a proposal and not assured. This does not necessarily mean that Laban's household was worshiping ancestral gods.

But I think it tells us that very probably, because of the discussion of inheritance that we saw with Leah and Rachel, Rachel thought that having these household gods would be punitive against her father. Also, as long as she had this household god in

the future, perhaps she would need this to prove that she is the daughter of Laban and that their children, Leah and Rachel's children, are the grandchildren of their father. We'll come back to how these gods are disposed of later in the story in future lessons.

Well, I have read how Laban chose to respond rightly to the dream at night that God gave him. So, Laban does overtake him after a seven-day forced march with his men, and he arrives. In verse 26, Laban says to Jacob, what have you done? This may remind you a bit of the garden, where the same question has been put to what is the case with Adam and Eve and then also with the serpent. So, Laban says, and also I should say quickly, when it has to do with the mistreatment of Abraham, how Abraham has lied regarding his wife, and how the same question has been put to him by Pharaoh and others.

You've deceived me, and you've carried off my daughters like captives in war. Well, it's very hard to take him seriously, given that if there is a cheat between the two, then certainly we can award Laban the greater deceiver. And you've carried off my daughters like captives in war.

Well, that was not the case. Why did you run off secretly and deceive me? Why didn't you tell me? And then he comes up with this imaginary feast and celebration and happy departure, and all is restored. Well, that was not the case whatsoever, that he did not have that positive attitude toward the family.

So, he's still using his words in order to satisfy himself, and to justify himself. Verse 29, I have the power to harm you. Now, this is putting Jacob at a disadvantage.

And this is what Jacob was afraid of and why he fled secretly. But God of your father said to me, be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad. So, he's going to respond to that.

He's not going to take advantage of Jacob. But then he heightens the tension and increases the charge against Jacob by saying in verse 30, why did you steal my gods? And Jacob becomes terribly angry. Notice what it says in verse 35.

Rachel said to her father, he was going through the tent, looking for these household gods. Jacob was so angry, you just check it out. I'm innocent of theft.

And so, when he comes to the tent of Rachel, he comes into the tent. Rachel is hiding the household gods in her saddlebag. And so Rachel says to her father, don't be angry, my Lord, that I cannot stand up in your presence.

So, she's sitting on her saddle. The gods are hidden. They must have been small enough to be put in a saddlebag.

I can't stand up because I'm having my menstrual period. So out of deference to her and her condition, he doesn't look through the saddlebags. Verse 36, Jacob feels very victimized.

And he says, what is my crime? Verse 36. So, he has a countercharge of all that he has accomplished for Laban in these 20 years. Well, Laban agrees that there needs to be a peace relationship.

And that is what occurs when Laban offers to make a covenant in verse 44. And so they have two witnesses to this peace treaty. First, a stone that is set up as a pillar, and then as a heap of stones that also marks the occasion.

And then we have an oath, followed by a covenant sacrificial meal. Let's pick that up. In verse 53, may the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, Nahor being the brother of Abraham, the ancestor of the Laban clan, the God of their father judge between us.

So, if there's any transgression in their arrangement of peace, not to take advantage or violence against one or the other, then God will adjudicate that. So, this isn't, you see, an oath that is sworn to on the basis of the integrity of God. So, Jacob took an oath in the name of the fear of his father, Isaac.

Notice that fear is capitalized. Let's go back then to explain this in earlier verses. Verse 42, where Jacob says to Laban, if the God of my father, really that could be translated, not literally father referring to Isaac, it could be grandfather referring to Abraham, or it could just be simply ancestor, the God of my ancestors, the God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac.

Now, this is not a different deity, as some would be suggesting, but rather, this is an apposition, as you see, to what preceded the God of my father. Now, who is the God of my father? He is the God of Abraham and he is the fear of Isaac. So, the fear of Isaac is one and the same as the God of Abraham and the God of my father.

Why is the fear of Isaac used here? Well, it's because there is a figure of speech in which a cause, or rather let me reverse that, where an effect is put for the cause. In this case, the cause is God. Instead of saying that he is the God of Isaac, he puts the effect of God, namely fear.

And this fear is bound up in this covenant relationship God has with the Abraham family of protection, of provision, and that when God appears, he strikes fear in the heart of the people who receive this appearance of God. It is not a paralyzing fear, but it is a sense of awesome. It's a sense of facing reality head on.

The consequence is that response of worship in the case of the faithful and those who are not willing to concede and to cooperate with God's greater plan. So, we are reading then this oath taken in the name of their ancestors, the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor. And then there's this sacrificial meal.

This was characteristic of peace treaties, where there would be a dining from a sacrificial animal, confirming the ceremonial ritual of the treaty. Now that there is a peaceful departure, notice in verse 55 that early the next morning, Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. So, reconciliation occurs.

Then he left and returned home. Now when we pick up next time, chapter 32 and following, we will find that there is another kind of struggle that takes place. Struggle within the family and now struggle with God.

And the consequence of his struggle with God is a remarkable transformation that is occurring in the character of Jacob. And we will find that just as we have a happy outcome, of reconciliation between the two branches of Abraham and Nahor, there's going to be a happy reconciliation between Jacob and Esau at Jacob's return. This will be our next lesson, lesson 19.

This is Dr. Kenneth Mathews in his teaching on the book of Genesis. This is session 18, Jacob and Laban, Genesis chapters 29 through 31.