

Genesis 31:36–55

God Is Witness

Main idea: Taking a vow requires great humility (because God sees everything) and gospel hope (because God is almighty and holy and just). Thankfully, God vowed Himself to save in Christ, and He has kept His vow!

Introduction

The context is a reminder that taking a vow requires great humility and gospel hope. Jacob flies off the handle, but his position is not as righteous as he thinks. Taking a vow requires great humility to know that we are not so righteous as we think we are. And this is why taking a vow requires gospel hope. Because if we could see what God sees, not only would we resolve to do everything within our power to keep the vow, but our hope for not being destroyed would be in Christ alone. Laban is actually frightened a bit—if not of Jacob’s rage then at least of Jacob’s God, but not frightened enough. Jacob, looking back at this vow later (cf. 35:2), ought to have been sent flying to Christ for fear of what he had done.

1. Taking a vow requires great humility, because God is witness, and He sees everything.
 - a. It is the God Who sees Whom you call to witness. What use is a witness Who cannot see? But how fearful a Witness Who sees every intention of every thought of every heart. It is the God Who sees (cf. v42) that must be the witness.
 - b. “He will be a witness” (v44—‘covenant’ feminine, but vb masculine).
 - i. God is a great witness of others. He is not fooled by Laban. Laban was like a typical socialist leader—speaking as if his care was for his family (v50), but really acting and thinking as if anything and everything belongs to him (v43). In rhetoric it’s, “What’s mine is yours and yours is mine,” but in reality it’s “What’s yours is mine, and what’s mine is also and especially mine,” and the purported motivation is the good of everyone! Thus, he passes himself off as generous to give to Jacob what was rightfully his in the first place—as socialist/communist abusers of authority always do. Whether they know what they are doing or not, God is truly witnessing, and He will call to account.
 - ii. God is a great witness of ourselves.
 1. This requires great seriousness of ourselves in taking vows. Swear only to what is right to do. Swear only to that which is weighty and serious. Swear only to that which you have reason to believe that God will help you do.
 2. This requires great seriousness of ourselves in reflecting upon how we have kept them. Marriage, husband. Marriage, wife. Marriage, couple. Baptism, parents. Membership/profession. God sees all—not just appearance but the heart. “Do you now unreservedly dedicate your child to God, and promise, in humble reliance upon divine grace, that you will endeavor to set before (him) a godly example, that you will pray with and for (him), that you will teach (him) the doctrines of our holy religion, and that you will strive, by all the means of God’s appointment, to bring (him) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?”
2. Taking a vow requires gospel hope, because God is witness, and He is almighty and holy and just.
 - a. It is the God of power Whom you call to witness. An idol can do nothing about it.
 - b. Laban doesn’t call his own gods to judge in v53, because they have shown themselves worthless.
 - i. He is doing everything that he can to protect himself from harm. He himself was happy to afflict his daughters and was the reason that they were already in a polygamous marriage.
 - ii. Laban would take whatever he could get away with, which he thought was much indeed, but was running into the reality of Jacob’s God. So, he employs the reality of Jacob’s God as a hedge against revenge (v52). That is really the only thing gained by Laban (who was glad to trade and play with his daughters’ lives for his own personal gain to begin with).
 - iii. Laban refers to multiple gods (‘judge’ is in the plural in v53, but he makes sure to include Yahweh, cf. v49).
 - iv. It is well that believers would be known—even and especially to unbelievers—as those who would do anything for their God. Does the way we keep our vows that communicate that to unbelievers, or even to other believers... does it hold true (by grace) before the watching eye of God?
 - c. But the God Who can overrule v38–40 makes a potent enforcer of a vow.

Conclusion

The God before Whom you vow is worthy of that hope in Christ. But unless it is in Christ that you are hoping in Him, (a) you will almost certainly fail to be externally faithful, even before the eyes of men; (b) your certain failure before the eyes of God will be fairly and fully punished in an eternity of Hell. But our God perfectly keeps His covenant of redemption. Both from His side, in the exchange between the Father and the Son in eternity. And from ours, as Christ has come as the last Adam, and has not only atoned for our debt from the first, but also kept perfect covenant as our Mediator in the covenant of grace. HOPE IN HIM!