

## The Fifty-Ninth Chapter

### How *Jacob* departed from *Laban*: What this Figure signifieth, and what is to be understood thereby<sup>1</sup>

1. **I**N this chapter for the most part is the outward history set forth, under which yet the spirit hath its secret figure wherewith it playeth, for the text saith, *And the words of the children of Laban came before Jacob, saying, Jacob hath gotten all our father's goods to himself, and of our father's goods hath he procured this riches. And Jacob looked upon Laban's countenance, and saw that it was not towards him as formerly* (Gen. xxxi. 1, 2).

2. This is a figure represented in the spirit of Christ. When the spirit of Christ in man hath gotten the kingdom of the human nature to himself, then the envy of the Serpent in the wrath of nature in flesh and blood awaketh, understanding and feeling that the power of nature in man is taken away from him, and opposeth the spirit of Christ in the power of nature.

3. Then proceedeth the opposite will in man, so that the poor soul is everywhere faint and in an agony, perceiving that it dwelleth among strange goods, and that the devil is its neighbour, and hath a continual access to its own nature, and opposeth the soul, because it hath, in Christ's spirit, taken away from him the kingdom of nature, viz. the land and country which he had for his possession. And therefore the mortal nature in the wrath of God sets its desire and endeavour against the poor soul, as a stranger, unfriendly, when it seeth that it looseth its voluptuous earthly inheritance (which right is intimated in the children of Laban, where reason looketh to get temporal honour and pleasure), that all its natural right is taken away, as Jacob by subtlety took away Laban's goods.

4. Then thus saith God to the soul, as here he did to Jacob, *Return again into thy father's country, to thy kindred: I will be with thee* (Gen. xxxi. 3). That is, the poor soul should enter again into its first country of its father, viz. into the eternal Word, out of which it proceeded; and therein God blesseth it, and therein it can also call its

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxxi.

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children and members, and bring them along out of the servile house of God's anger in the kingdom of nature, as Jacob called his wives and his children, and brought them out of the servitude of his father. Thus also the enlightened soul bringeth the power of its life in the kingdom of nature, together with its fellow-members, out of the servile house of flesh and blood, again into the first house, viz. into God's Word.

5. And as *Jacob did flee* from the servile house of his stepfather, and *Laban pursued after and would hurt him* (Gen. xxxi. 21-23), so also in like manner is done to the children of Christ, when they begin to flee out of the servile house of Satan, viz. out from fleshly pleasure and voluptuousness, and would again enter into its first land of its father, viz. into righteousness and the fear of God. Then instantly the fleshly crew of the wicked world, with rage and folly pursue after it and would slay it, and take away with evil and false tongues all its riches and goods in God's righteousness.

6. But the Lord aweth them, that they cannot do it (as was done to Laban), though they stand up and reprove the children of God as unrighteous, because they turn away from their idols and abominations, and follow their hypocrisy no more, neither will they bear their evil yoke any more, and serve them in their unrighteousness, and call their falsehood, good. As the present world playeth the hypocrite under this yoke, and serveth their wickedness only that their god Mäusim may live and be fat.

7. The spirit of God here also presenteth a figure, shewing how Christ would for a while put himself under this servile yoke in the kingdom of nature, and would betroth to him Adam's daughter, that is, our flesh and blood, and acquire to himself Adam's possessions, goods and riches, viz. the kingdom or dominion of the human nature; that is, draw many men to him, and in the end go therewith out of this servile house of this world, again into his Father's eternal house, in which departure to his Father would the devil and the wicked world scorn him and quite slay him, and would take away and rob him of his goods, as also of his children which he hath here begotten. Even as the devil, by the Pharisees and wicked Jews, did, who would take away and rob Christ of all his faithful children, as Laban pursued and hunted after Jacob, and would take away his purchased goods from him again.

8. But as *God would not suffer Laban to hurt Jacob*, (Gen. xxxi. 7), so God would not suffer the devil and the wicked high priests to rob Christ of his purchased goods. Although they slew his outward

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humanity, yet he rose again from the dead, and brought his purchased goods into his Father's country.

9. The spirit of Moses representeth in this chapter a wonderful figure, which ought well to be observed, because he intimates a secret mystery under it: For he saith, *When Jacob did flee away from Laban, Rachel had stolen away her father's idol gods*: and further saith, *Thus Jacob stole away the heart of Laban the Syrian, in that he told him not that he fled*: and we see further, *how Laban, when he came to Jacob, was eager after his idol gods, and searched all Jacob's household stuff for his idol gods*. Also we see in this text, *how Rachel was she that loved those idol gods, and sat upon them, and so hid them that her father could not get them again* (Gen. xxxi. 19, 20, 30, 33, 34).

10. In these words there is represented to us an outward and an inward figure, shewing how it would go with Israel in the future. For these idol gods were not heathenish idols, according to the constellation or star (Acts vii. 43) Moloch, as the heathen had. But as we read, they made images, monuments, statues or pictures of their friends that were dead, as a pattern for instruction, which images among the heathen afterwards were turned to idols; and these might well be such images of his kindred that were dead, which Laban was loath to lose, because they were patterns of instruction, and memorials to him of his ancestors and deceased kindred whom he loved.

11. But the true figure under which the spirit pointeth at the future, is this: First, That Israel would not continually cleave to God with their whole heart, but would always take these idol gods of fleshly self-love along with them, and love themselves and their images, viz. genealogies of human greatness, state, high birth and noble pedigrees of gentility, more than God, even as it came to pass.

12. Especially this departure of Jacob intimates the departure of Israel out of Egypt into the promised land, when they took with them also their fleshly idol gods, and presently after *served their own idol gods* (1 Sam. viii. 8), viz. human greatness; and forsook their God, and regarded their Mammon, and would have *kings among them according to the custom of the heathen* (1 Sam. viii. 19), and forsook their right King, who had brought them out of Egypt.

13. Secondly, It intimates how Christ, in whose figure Jacob stood, would take to him this Rachel in our flesh and blood, viz. these, in Adam, idol-wills of the soul turned away from God, which hath acquired to itself images and idols, and possessed them as Rachel; and would bring the averted wills of the soul, with their acquired idols

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and images, out of the idol's house or temple, which idols, viz. idol-wills and desires, must afterwards be all broken to pieces in the death of Christ.

14. As presently the figure is represented to us, when God said to Jacob, *Arise, and go to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar to God, who appeared to thee when thou fleddest from thy brother Esau. Then said Jacob to his household, and to all that were with him, Put away from you the strange gods that are among you, and cleanse you and change your garments: And let us arise, and go to Bethel; that I may there make an altar to God, that heard me in the time of my trouble, and hath been with me in the way which I have gone* (Gen. xxxv. 1-3).

15. Which history of Jacob signifieth nothing else but this, viz. when Christ would with this Rachel's idol gods, viz. our flesh and blood, depart from this servile house, and go to his Father, then he would by his going forth, when he should build the high altar before God (which altar is himself), lay off these our idols in human self-will, viz. every imagination of self-love, before the altar of God in his death, and cleanse our hearts, viz. our soul's will, and change our garments, viz. our flesh and blood; as this text in the thirty-fifth chapter clearly signifies, and wholly intendeth it, that Christ would offer us up upon that same Altar of his New Testament, to the God who appeared to us again in our trouble and misery after the fall, in his Covenant of grace.

16. But that the text of Moses saith, *Jacob stole away the heart of Laban the Syrian, in that he secretly fled away with his daughters* (Gen. xxxi. 20, 21): it hath the very same inward spiritual figure contained in it. For *the Word became man*, and took Laban's, viz. the earthly Adam's daughters, and brought them by divine subtlety away out of Adam's house into God's house, which in that place is called *stealing*, in that the children of Adam are thus stolen from the kingdom of God's wrath, that is, brought away in the divine wit and subtlety.

17. For the anger of God had possessed men in the right of nature, but Christ came and married with them, and stole them, together with the idol gods, away from the anger, and offered them up to God upon his Altar, which is himself, and laid off the images of man's self-love, and cleansed our garments before God, that we might serve him at this Altar.

18. This is properly understood concerning Rachel's idol gods: the figure indeed sets down only the outward history, but the spirit of God hath its figure under it. For the whole history of Abraham,

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Isaac and Jacob stands inwardly in the figure of Christ; for the covenant between Laban and Jacob, and all that happened therein, is a figure of Christ; for Laban here standeth in the figure of the kingdom of nature, and Jacob in the figure of Christ.

19. *Laban upbraids Jacob, that he fled from him, and did not suffer him first to kiss his children, and that he might conduct them on their way with mirth and with tabrets* (Gen. xxxi. 27, 28). Thus also doth nature with the children of Christ, when they secretly flee from it, and forsake the idol's house [or temple]; then the children of nature's kingdom upbraid these children of Christ, for fickle forsworn people, for heretics, novellists, new lights, enthusiasts, or whatsoever sect can be named. And say unto them, When you will depart from your wicked way and enter into another life, why do you not tell it to our high priests, that they may lead you onwards with their ceremonies, viz. confession, sacraments, intercessions? Why do you not observe the usage of the Churches, where the kingdom of Christ is in mirth, with roaring, organs, and pipes? Why do you steal away from us secretly, and go another way than our ordinances and decrees prescribe? and therefore are enemies unto them, persecute them, and hunt them with censurings and disgraces, as evil children and forsworn, which had robbed them of their idol gods, and will not honour their hypocrisies for gods; as Laban pursued after Jacob and upbraideth him, because he had not first kept that pageantry and solemnity, and told him beforehand that he would travel and be gone.

20. Thus Babel also would fain have it, that the children of Christ should only enter in to God through their pageantries and solemnities, and belly-ordinances; and whosoever will enter in to God otherwise than through their ordinances, and flee from this servile house [of bondage], he is damned and cannot come to God.

21. But Jacob can well go to his father without Laban's pageantry and solemnity; and though he upbraid Jacob and calleth his way wrong, yet his way was right in the sight of God. For God had commanded him so, and Laban could not withhold him at all. So also Christ's children, when the spirit of Christ in them commandeth them to flee out from Babel, cannot be withheld; also it doth not hurt them, though the world blameth them never so for it, and scorn, deride, disgrace, and upbraideth them for fools, heretics, and enthusiasts.

22. Yet the Most High reproveth and chargeth Laban that he speak not otherwise to Jacob than friendly;<sup>1</sup> that is, the disdain<sup>2</sup> of

<sup>1</sup> Courteously and kindly.

<sup>2</sup> Blasphemies, reproach, misusage.

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Babel towards the children of Christ must, in the end, turn to their mere joy and kindness, and now Laban must let them depart with their goods and riches. For God commandeth his children to flee from Babel (Rev. xviii. 4), and to go into the first country of their father (out of which they are departed with Adam), not through the solemnity and pageantry of Babel, but through the conversion of the mind and will: viz. a new obedience.

23. For God hath as much pleasure in the solemnity and pageantry of Babel, as in Laban's tabret and piping. He requires a penitent, converting heart, which in highest simplicity and humility, without any solemnity or pageantry, draweth near unto him, and departeth from Babel: with such a one he goeth along and blesseth him.

24. For *when Jacob was gone forth*, without solemnity and pageantry, *then the angels of God met him, whom he called God's host* (Gen. xxxii. 1, 2); which signifieth that when the children of God go forth from human inventions<sup>1</sup> and imaginations, and account all earthly things as nothing, and slip away from the hypocrisy of all their titulary brethren, then they get the angels of God for a guard, who go along with them, and lead them on their way in their going out from Babel, as here was done to Jacob.

25. For as soon as Christ is born in a man, so that the mind goeth forth out of the Adamical servile house of images,<sup>2</sup> then the angels of God are appointed his guardians.

<sup>1</sup> Trifles, fables, chimeras, fantasies.

<sup>2</sup> Or imaginary conceits.