Studies in Genesis

(Leaflet 25)

THE STOLEN BLESSING

AND

JACOB AT BETHEL

Genesis 27:1—28:22

Of the seven appearances of the Lord to Jacob, two stand out preeminently, those which took place at Bethel and at Peniel. At Bethel Jacob saw the ladder reaching from earth to heaven; at Peniel he wrestled with the angel until the break of day. And these two experiences mark the two great turning points in his career. From his birth to God’s appearance to him at Bethel, he was a “natural man,” unsaved, yet seeking material blessings from God; Bethel marks his conversion. From Bethel to Peniel he was a “carnal man,” saved, but still mercenary, grasping, shrewd, and self-willed; Peniel marks his consecration. From Peniel to his death, he was a “spiritual man,” not perfect by any means, but submissive to the will of God, a blessing to Pharaoh and the Gentiles of Egypt, as well as to his own family. (Cf. I Cor. 2:14—3:3.)


Bible historians tell us that Jacob must have been about seventy-seven years of age when he saw the Lord at Bethel. The Scripture record tells us that he spent twenty years with Laban at Haran (Gen. 31:38). As he returned to Canaan, he wrestled with the angel at Peniel. That leaves some fifty-two years of a yielded life, for at the age of one-hundred and forty-seven he was “gathered unto his fathers.” (See Gen. 47:28.)
This outline view of Jacob's life tells us something of the grace of God. How long and how patiently Jehovah worked in the heart of this son of Abraham and Isaac! For some seventy-seven years Jacob was a "natural man." For twenty years more he was a "carnal man." Not until he was almost one-hundred years of age was he entirely submissive to the will of God. Yet the Lord who called him to become the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, and the channel of blessing to the world, dealt patiently and faithfully with His self-willed child. Surely God's dealings with Jacob encourage our own faltering hearts; for how stumbling are our wayward steps!

In our last lesson we began the study of the first period of the life of Jacob—from birth to Bethel. Today we shall consider the remainder of that first part of his life, which tells of the stolen blessing and God's appearance to him at Bethel as he fled from his angry brother. In our next lesson, "the Lord willing," we shall see how God led him and chastened him and blessed him—from Bethel to Peniel and back to Bethel. From his return to Bethel unto his death our study of his life will be interwoven with that of Joseph and his brethren.

A glance at our Bibles will tell us that our lesson for today covers chapters twenty-seven and twenty-eight. Will you, my friend, please keep your Bible open at the place of our reading, from here on to the end of our study of Genesis? I hope you have been doing this hitherto; but especially in the printed leaflets, outlining the remaining studies of Genesis, space will not permit as many full quotations as we have been using, for these stories are often very long. Nor will it be as necessary to print these that are already familiar to us as it has been to keep constantly before the reader's eye the details of the earlier chapters of this first book of the Bible—so fundamental to all Scripture truth, and possibly not so familiar to some. Yet, as we keep our Bibles open before us, in the reading of these stories that every Sunday School child should know, we shall be surprised at the richness of the details, often overlooked even by those who have related them throughout the years. And let me remind Sunday School teachers and Christian parents once more
that even the very small children would rather hear these stories right from the Bible than to hear us tell them in our own words. Such is the power of the Holy Spirit’s own inspired record!

Our lesson for today, covering chapters twenty-seven and twenty-eight, falls logically into four divisions: (1) The stolen blessing; (2) Esau’s bitterness and hatred toward Jacob, leading him to threaten his brother’s life; (3) Jacob’s departure for Haran; and (4) Jacob at Bethel, where he saw the Lord, and was born again. May the Holy Spirit take the things of Christ from these searching Scriptures, and show them unto us!

**The Stolen Blessing**

*Genesis 27:1-29*

Both parents and both sons were at fault in the transaction concerning the stolen blessing. Isaac was self-willed; Rebekah and Jacob were deceptive; and Esau had forfeited his right to the blessing.

1. **Isaac’s Self-Will,** verses 1-4. Not only had God told Rebekah before the children were born that “the elder should serve the younger”; but Esau had twice proved himself unworthy, in that he had “despised his birthright” and had married two heathen women. Esau’s own behavior, to say nothing of God’s express command, should have made Isaac hesitate to bestow upon this elder son the covenant blessing. How could a heathen mother train her children to look for the promised Redeemer? And how could Esau expect God’s best, when he deliberately linked his life with the godless world?

Moreover, Isaac seems to have been running ahead of God’s time for the bestowal of this important blessing. He said to Esau, “Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death” (verse 2); and yet he lived forty years after this. In his self-will, he was running ahead of God, not waiting patiently for His guidance. That is why he sent Esau out into the field to get venison, that he might eat it before he blessed his son. Was there a certain self-gratification also in this eating of the “savoury meat” such as Isaac loved?
2. Rebekah’s Deception, verses 5-17. Rebekah had known the special blessing of enquiring “of the Lord” (25:22), and of hearing Him tell her His will; for before the sons were born she had prayed, and God had spoken to her. She was not a pagan woman; she knew better than to be a hypocrite, teaching her son also to steal. Never is one justified in seeking a right purpose by a wrong means. Rebekah should have trusted God to overrule; she knew He had said that Jacob should have the blessing.

Little wonder that both Isaac and Rebekah disappear almost entirely from the inspired record shortly after this incident in their lives! After Isaac sent Jacob away, to take a wife from the daughters of Laban (28:1-5), nothing more is said of his remaining forty years; only his death is mentioned (35:27-29). Rebekah, likewise, disappears from the picture; even her death is not recorded, though her burial in the cave of Machpelah is mentioned by Jacob before he died in Egypt (49-50).

Rebekah told her favorite son to stay with Laban, her brother in Haran, for “a few days,” until Esau’s “fury turn away” (27:44). Little did she realize that twenty long years would pass before Jacob’s return home. While the record does not say, it seems as though Rebekah had died before Jacob returned to Canaan; and if so, she did not see her beloved child again on earth. “The way of transgressors is hard,” but “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Prov. 13:15; Gal. 6:7).

After Esau had gone out from the presence of his father, Rebekah called Jacob and sent him, not for venison, but for “two good kids of the goats.” She was going to deceive Isaac, even in the kind of meat she prepared. And for every objection on Jacob’s part, she had a deceitful scheme.

3. Jacob’s Craftiness, verses 18-25. The true character of Jacob is seen in his fear of being caught in this sin, not in the fear of the sin itself. And how human he was in this! How like mankind of all ages! How many there are who will refrain from certain sins, only because they are afraid of the consequences! Jacob feared lest his father should feel him and he should “seem to him as a deceiver” (verse [41]
It was the "curse" that he feared, should his father discover his hypocrisy; for he said, "I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing."

"And his mother said unto him, Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice. . . . And Rebekah took goodly raiment of her eldest son Esau (another deception) . . . and put them upon Jacob her younger son: and she put the skins of the kids of the goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck . . . and he came unto his father . . . ."

One falsehood called for another, both on the part of Rebekah and on the part of Jacob. As we read the conversation between Isaac and Jacob, we are almost startled at the five different falsehoods Jacob glibly told: (1) In response to his father's, "Who art thou, my son?" he said, "I am Esau thy firstborn." (2) He then continued, "I have done according as thou badest me . . . ." (3) He called the goat meat "venison." (4) In reply to his father's question, "How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son?" he told the most shocking falsehood of all—"Because the Lord thy God brought it to me." (5) And finally, when Isaac was in doubt as to his son's identity, when he had felt Jacob's skin-covered hands and had "discerned him not," Jacob once more answered the direct question, "Art thou my very son Esau?" by saying, "I am."

"Oh what a tangled web we weave
When once we practice to deceive!"

4. The Blessing upon Jacob, verses 26-29.

"And his father Isaac said unto him, Come near now, and kiss me, my son. And he came near, and kissed him: and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of the field which the Lord hath blessed: therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee."
In these significant words there was the promise of temporal blessing, of national honor and prestige, and of the curse of God upon all who hate the Jew, as well as blessing upon all who love him. It was not until God Himself spoke to Jacob at Bethel that he heard the all-important prophecy confirmed, that through him "all the families of the earth" should be blessed—through the Messiah of Israel and the Word of God. But let us note that God had said to Abraham, when He called him out of Ur of Chaldea, these very words repeated by Isaac here, "cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee." That God-given prophecy has ever been—and always will be—irrevocably true!

If only Isaac had not been self-willed, if only Rebekah and Jacob had not been deceitful, God would have given Jacob the blessing in His own perfect time and way. Had He not promised it? He always keeps His Word! But because of their sinful scheming, all three, father, mother, and son, had to suffer anguish of soul, severe chastening, and separation from one another. And Esau had murder in his heart.

But who are we to criticize these four? We need only look into our own hearts to be made ashamed of our own deceptions, our own self-will, our own running ahead of God's plans for us. May He give us the grace to learn these lessons well.

This prophecy of Isaac concerning Jacob said, in part, "Be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee." Esau himself was not subject to Jacob, but his descendants were. "All they of Edom became David's servants" (II Sam. 8:14); and David came from the family of Jacob. Edom was another name for Esau, as we observed in our last lesson.

When Isaac gave to Esau the lesser blessing, after having learned of Jacob's deception, he also prophesied that Edom would "break the yoke" from off Israel's neck, thus gaining his independence. This also came to pass, as we read in II Kings 8:20, II Chron. 21:8-10; for the Edomites "revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over them—
selves.” Still later prophecies, of course, point on to that yet future day, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall rule over all the world through the house of Israel. Then will the fullness of blessing through the promised “seed” be realized, when Christ shall reign “from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth” (Psalm 72:8).

As we look back upon the sad story of the stolen blessing, we must remember that Jacob was chosen, not for any merit of his own, but because God knew he would believe Him. And, my friend, Jacob’s God saved you and me for the same reason, not because He saw anything good in us. Whatever our failures have been, whatever we are in our own sinful selves, our God-given faith has saved us for all eternity. One day we shall share our Lord’s eternal glory, not because we are good, not because of anything we shall have done for Him, but just because we believe His Word. We may receive from His pierced hand a reward for something done for Him; but we shall be in heaven with Him by His grace alone.

Jacob surely did not deserve the blessing. People sometimes ask, “Why did the Lord not select characters whom we could admire, upon whom to bestow His blessing?” But where could such men be found? The fact is that God tells the truth about us all. There is only One who is “altogether lovely,” and He is the Saviour Himself. God is dealing with sinners. He has to take us just as we are. And what pleases God is a heart that longs for Him and His blessings. Esau did not want his birthright; Jacob did. That made the difference. And because God could take even a grasping, selfish, mercenary, deceitful Jacob and train him for service, to Him is all the glory. He can use even the weakest vessel, making it meet for His own use. That is grace.

**Esau’s Bitterness and Hatred**

*Genesis 27:30-41*

1. *Esau’s “Great and Exceeding Bitter Cry,”* verses 30-38. Our natural inclination is to sympathize with Esau, because Jacob did take advantage of him. And yet we must
look at the whole incident in the light of Esau's rejection of the things of God. This we dwelt upon at some length in our last lesson. He bartered away his right to the blessing; therefore, he had no claim to it later. Yet when he returned from his hunting and learned that Jacob had stolen his blessing, "he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father" (verse 34). Then it was that he asked, "Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times" (verse 36). (We have already seen that "Jacob" means "sup-planter," one who takes the place of another.)

Twice Isaac told Esau that he could not alter the fact that Jacob had been blessed—and that he should be blessed (verses 33, 37). And again "Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept" (verse 38).

Isaac did pronounce a lesser blessing upon Esau, but Esau "hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob" (verse 41).

God overruled Esau's hatred of Jacob, and preserved the latter's life; but the strife between the descendants of these two brothers continued throughout the centuries. That is one reason why the Jews in the time of Christ bitterly hated Herod the Great, for Herod was of the family of Esau.

One other incident in our lesson throws light upon Esau's character, and makes us realize that he sensed his unhappy position, even though he did not take the right steps to remedy it. When he saw that "the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac his father," he married a daughter of Ishmael, whose family had been rejected by God. (See 28:6-9.) It only made matters worse to add "unto the wives which he had," both of whom were pagan, yet another whose people gave no evidence of faith in the living God. Practically everything Esau did designated him as a man of the world, utterly lacking in spiritual discernment.
2. The Lesser Blessing upon Esau, verses 39, 40. Four details are noteworthy in the lesser blessing bestowed upon Esau: (1) He was to receive material blessing; (2) he was to live by the sword; (3) he was to serve his brother; and (4) he was to break Jacob's yoke from off his neck. We need not dwell longer here upon these prophecies, the last two of which we have already considered in connection with the blessing Jacob received. But let us note that all four of these predictions have been fulfilled in the history of the Edomites and Israel.

Only the goodness of God and His eternal purpose for Jacob prevented Esau from carrying out his threat to kill his brother. Even after twenty years had passed, he went to meet Jacob as the latter was returning to Canaan, taking with him four hundred men (Gen. 32:6). But God had a purpose for Jacob's life; and, as we shall see when we come to that part of the story, God answered Jacob's prayer, and delivered him from Esau in a wonderful way, even touching the heart of Esau until he manifested a spirit of real forgiveness. "Nothing is too hard for the Lord!"

"By Faith Isaac Blessed Jacob and Esau"

Verse 33 holds a beautiful illustration of the grace of God. Isaac "trembled very exceedingly" when he realized that, in spite of his own disobedience in attempting to reverse the expressed will of God, yet his sovereign God had overruled. Doubtless he "trembled" at the thought that Jacob had stolen the blessing from Esau, and that his own plans had been thwarted. But faith also entered in here; for he said to Esau, "... yea, and he shall be blessed." Submissive to God's will at last, he did not curse Jacob, as Jacob had feared; rather, he uttered those significant words, "... and he shall be blessed." Isaac knew in his heart that the covenant blessing was to go to Jacob, and now he was yielded to God's will in the matter. That is why we read in Heb. 11:20, "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come."

What grace! To change Isaac's determined self-will into faith! These words could not have been written of Isaac while he was blessing Jacob, believing that he was Esau.
That was not faith; that was disobedience. But now, as he “trembled” at the realization of God’s sovereign will and purpose, as he saw his own sin before him, then “by faith” he could reiterate the blessing upon Jacob, even as he also blessed his favorite son in a lesser degree.

Again, Isaac realized that God’s blessing upon Jacob was irrevocable; therefore, he said, “. . . yea, and he shall be blessed.” When God does a thing, it is done forever!

**Jacob’s Departure for Haran**

**Genesis 27:42—28:5**

Rebekah’s immediate motive for sending Jacob away is plainly stated in the text; it was to help Jacob escape from his brother’s fury and intent to kill. It has been suggested that she used subterfuge in persuading Isaac to let Jacob go, stressing the importance of his taking a wife from among her own kinsmen rather than from the heathen “daughters of Heth,” as Esau had done. Whether Isaac needed to be persuaded or not, it was without doubt God’s plan for Jacob that he go to Haran. Thus a two-fold purpose was accomplished, in that Jacob escaped from Esau’s anger, at the same time being led of God into the experiences that were to follow.

Little did mother and son realize that Jacob’s “few days” of absence would extend to twenty years, and that Rebekah would not see her beloved Jacob again on earth! Yet out of all this selfishness and sin and self-will, God brought good to pass. Out of the separation and chastening that were to follow, He wrought in Jacob’s heart and life until this scheming “supplanter” became “a prince with God.”

Before Isaac sent him to Laban, Rebekah’s brother, to take a wife from among Laban’s daughters (28:1, 2), he blessed him again with these significant words:

“God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham” (28:3, 4).

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In these words Isaac very definitely reiterated the blessing of the Abrahamic covenant upon Jacob, with its promise of the land of Canaan, as well as the accompanying blessings of that covenant. As he was guided by the Holy Spirit, he referred to the Lord as "God Almighty." And how much Jacob was to need the omnipotent God! He was leaving home, a wanderer; he was to endure hardship and toil; he was to be deceived and envied by Laban and his sons. Only the Almighty God could help him through all the testings he was to face.

Someone has said that the name "Almighty God" is used forty-eight times in the Old Testament, and that thirty-one of these occur in the book of Job. Why? Because Job is preeminently the book of human suffering. In all his sorrow and pain Job turned to the Almighty God for help. And, dear, suffering Christian, He is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8).

**JACOB AT BETHEL**

*Genesis 28:10-22*

1. **Jacob—A Wanderer,** verses 10, 11. Because of the unscrupulous way in which Jacob got the blessing, God had to add sorrow to it. He had to cleanse and order Jacob's life. On an ignominious flight from home and loved ones, Jacob had time to meditate upon his sins. He knew that God cannot condone evil. As he journeyed from home, he was a wanderer, not a pilgrim. Abraham and Isaac were pilgrims, passing through a godless world with their eyes fixed upon that "better country." But as a wanderer, away from home, Jacob spent twenty years out of the land of promise, living in fear and dread of his brother, in the event of his return.

"And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep" (verses 10, 11)

Jacob may have been thinking of the hypocrisy he had practiced, as he lay down to sleep that first night away from
his loved ones, his head upon the stones, the stars for a covering. Possibly the consciousness of his sin swept over him, preparing his heart for the vision God was to send him. This must have been the thought of the hymn writer, Sarah F. Adams, when she wrote those familiar and much-loved lines:

"Though like a wanderer,
The sun gone down,
Darkness be over me,
My rest a stone;
Yet in my dreams I'd be
Nearer, my God, to Thee."

2. "Behold a Ladder..." verses 12, 13. In his dreams Jacob was drawn very near to God; he was born again that night as he saw the Lord!

"And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it..."

We are not left in doubt as to the meaning of this vision. The Lord Jesus plainly told us that He Himself is "Jacob's Ladder." He is the only Way to God! He is the One whom Jacob saw that night at Bethel.

It was after John the Baptist had pointed Him out as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) that two of John's disciples had turned to follow Jesus. One of these was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He found Peter, and brought him to the Lord. The next day Jesus found Philip, and bade him also follow Him. And Philip found Nathanael. This beautiful story of the calling these disciples is found in the first chapter of John's Gospel. Let us turn to it, to read the remarkable words of verses 47-51. Nathanael, knowing that the Messiah had to be born in Bethlehem, even as the prophet had foretold (Micah 5:2), could not understand how He could come out of Nazareth, as Philip had said. The Lord Jesus, knowing Nathanael's heart, spoke of him, saying,

"Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"

Jesus' knowledge of Nathanael's honest heart surprised the
man; therefore, he asked, "Whence knowest thou me?" To Nathanael Jesus was a Stranger. But the Lord surprised him yet further by saying,

"Before that Philip called thee, when thou was under the fig tree, I saw thee."

"Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel."

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

Jacob saw "the angels of God ascending and descending on" the ladder which touched both heaven and earth. And the Lord Jesus said that "the Son of man" is that ladder, upon whom "the angels of God" ascend and descend. In another place He said, while speaking His farewell message to His own,

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

Jacob saw the Lord above the ladder that night in his vision; Jesus said the Son of Man is that ladder. Could any truth be more plainly set forth? There is no other way to heaven; there is no other way to the Father. Christ Himself is the Way!

The longer we meditate upon the truth of what Jacob saw that night, as he lay with his head upon the stones, the more wonderful does the vision become. The ladder touched heaven, and it touched earth. Surely God was teaching Jacob that the Son of Man was to touch both heaven and earth. Always He was eternal God. Then in order to die for Jacob and for sinners of all ages, He had to become a Man. But He was still God when He was "manifest in the flesh," Immanuel, "which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matt. 1:23). Eternal God; perfect Man! What a Saviour! What a Way Home! No wonder the hymn writer added these beautiful words:
"There let the way appear,
Steps unto heaven;
All that Thou sendest me
In mercy given;
Angels to beckon me
Nearer, my God, to Thee."

How Jacob's poor, sinful soul must have rejoiced, as he saw, by faith, that his sins were washed away in the blood of the Saviour who was to come! How the certainty of heaven and the ministry of angels must have comforted his unworthy heart as he beheld the vision of the Lord in all His holiness!

The angels beckoned Jacob on to a higher, nobler, better life. And, my friend, the angels of God minister to us throughout our earthly pilgrimage. Since Jacob lived, many centuries ago, God has given added light, through His inspired Word, concerning the ministry of the holy angels on behalf of His children. Read Matt. 18:10 to find that the Lord Jesus Himself said that little children have "their angels," who behold the face of His Father in heaven. We dare not despise one of these little ones; "their angels" are ever present, ready to take their part. Read Luke 16:22 to see that the angels take the spirits of departing saints into the presence of God. Read Luke 15:10 to note that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Read Heb. 1:14 and Psalm 91:11 to learn something of the present ministry of the holy angels on behalf of the children of God:

"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

"For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."

3. The Abrahamic Covenant Confirmed to Jacob, verses 13-15. Jacob saw the Lord above the ladder, and heard for himself what his mother must have told him, what his father finally said to him when he blessed him—that he was to inherit the land of Canaan.
“And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed” (verse 13).

It was a reassuring promise—to a fugitive, a wanderer from home! But most wonderful of all, Jacob saw the Lord! Surely that vision alone was worth a thousand times more than all the earthly possessions in all the world!

But that was not all that the Lord said to Jacob that night. He promised him a great nation, through which the Saviour should come; for verse 14 continues:

“And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”

My friend, do you realize what those last lines mean? God spoke those very words to Abraham, then to Isaac, and now to Jacob. And the Holy Spirit said, in Gal. 3:8, that God preached “the gospel” unto Abraham when He uttered these remarkable words. What is the Gospel? It is the “good news” concerning the Saviour. No wonder Jacob was converted that night. He saw the Lord. He heard Him speak of the coming of Christ—the Way of God. He heard Him promise the Messiah of Israel and Saviour of “all families of the earth”—all this blessing to come through Jacob’s own posterity, “according to the flesh.”

But that still was not all the Lord said to Jacob that night. The fugitive and wanderer heard God promise His abiding presence whithersoever he should go, His keeping power, and His guidance even unto the land of promise once more:

“And, 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.”

Jacob knew that he did not deserve such kindness, such mercy and grace. He saw himself a sinner; he saw the Lord as a merciful Saviour.

"And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Beth-el."

"Bethel" means "house"; "El" is a Hebrew name for God. "The House of God"—"Beth-el"—that place marked Jacob's conversion, his new birth by faith in the shed blood of the promised Saviour and Lord. Again we turn to the word of the poet for expression of the praise that must have been in Jacob's heart—the praise that is in our own hearts—at the thought of such a Saviour:

"Then, with my waking thoughts
Bright with Thy praise,
Out of my stony griefs
Bethel I'll raise,
So by my woes to be
Nearer, my God, to Thee."

5. Jacob's Vow, verses 20-22. In the remaining verses of the chapter we read of Jacob's vow to give God the tithe, one-tenth of his possessions. Some have seen in the words, "If God will be with me" (verse 20), a doubt on Jacob's part; but the word "if" may be rendered "since." That seems the better way to think of it. Jacob knew the Lord would go with him; and since he was assured of His presence and blessing, he wanted to make this vow.

The question of the tithe is viewed differently by Christian people today. Some feel obligated to give a tenth to the Lord; others give far less; yet others give very much more. To those who feel obligated to give the tithe, let me say that this was a requirement under the Mosaic Law; whereas the Christian today is not under law; he is under grace. The Jew was required to give the tithe, in order that sacrifices might be provided, the priests cared for, and the people taught the blessing of giving to the Lord's work.
But let us remember that there were two Bible references to the tithe long before Moses was born. The portion Abraham gave to Melchizedek, on his return from delivering Lot, was a tenth of the spoils of the battle (Gen. 14:20). And Jacob’s vow at Bethel was made many years, even centuries, before Moses lived. Therefore, it would seem that the tithe is not strictly a part of the Mosaic Law alone; it is the scriptural minimum for God’s children of all ages. Yet we are not under law; we give not because we are compelled to give, but “because the love of Christ constraineth” us to make known His salvation.

There is no New Testament teaching about the tithe. But the New Testament does tell us how to give—liberally, joyfully, sacrificially, systematically. Some of the passages on this important subject are found in: I Cor. 16:1, 2; II Cor. 8:1-15; 9:1, 2, 5, 7; Acts 20:35.

Some time ago a teacher told me that in earlier years she had begun giving one-tenth of her salary to the Lord; but that long ago she had promised God to give Him all except the necessities for her own living. Needless to say, that woman is a liberal supporter of Christian missions. She is laying up “treasures in heaven.”

A man who is earning twenty dollars a week, and who has a family to support, finds it very much more difficult to give the tithe than do many others who have a large income and no family. Often people send me literature for distribution, urging Christians to go back to the tithe. I am quite sure that many members of this radio audience would have to cut down in their giving to the Lord’s work if they went back to the tithe. May God Himself teach us the grace of liberality, according to the way He has prospered us, that we may give, not grudgingly or of necessity, but joyfully, to make Him known.

“I AM WITH THEE . . . AND WILL KEEP THEE”

As we bring this lesson to a close, as we look back over the two chapters which we have been considering, we thank God once more for His great salvation. From the stolen blessing to Bethel—what a change God wrought in the life of
Jacob, when He met him and created in him a new heart! The wanderer, the fugitive, the thief, the deceiver, heard the holy God of heaven say unto him, “I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest.” After such an experience Jacob surely did not mind the stony pillow, the lonely journey, the unknown future. He knew the Lord, the God of his fathers. That was enough.

My friend, have you become discouraged, ever stumbling, ever falling into sin and grief? The God of Jacob wants to go with you and keep you. If He is your Saviour, let Him also be your Guide. If you have not met Him at “Bethel,” then look to Him who said, “I am the way . . .” The Lord Jesus died to save you; He is Jacob’s Ladder. And He will lead you Home. Then together, born-again souls, we shall be able to sing—whatever the sorrow, whatever the grief:

“Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee!
E’en though it be a cross
That raiseth me;
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer, my God, to Thee.”