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## Studies in Genesis - 26

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# Studies in Genesis

(Leaflet 26)

JACOB—FROM BETHEL TO PENIEL

AND

BACK TO BETHEL

Genesis 29:1—35:15; cf. 35:16—36:43

Twenty years passed between the time when Jacob saw the Lord above the ladder that reached from earth to heaven and the night when he wrestled with the angel until the break of day—twenty years from Bethel to Peniel. Then another eight or ten years elapsed before Jacob went all the way back to Bethel to keep his vow to the Lord. They were years of testing and trial, years of carnal self-seeking, years of reaping a harvest of disappointment and sorrow that followed a sowing of selfishness and self-will. But throughout these years God was taking care of Jacob, prospering him materially, teaching him more and more about Himself, preparing him for the place he was to hold in Israel's history, as the father of the twelve tribes of God's chosen people.

This is the period of Jacob's life which we want to study today. It covers chapters 29:1—35:15, and takes us from his conversion at Bethel to his consecration at Peniel, and beyond—even to his return to Bethel. Following this main portion of our lesson, we want to gather up the connecting links that complete the story, up to the life of Joseph, in chapter thirty-seven. These connecting links have to do with the death of Rachel and the birth of Benjamin, the death of Isaac, and the generations of Esau, all touching the life of Jacob personally and definitely.

FROM BETHEL TO HARAN

Genesis 29:1

It was a long and difficult journey of more than four-hundred miles that Jacob took from Bethel to Haran. He

was alone, with only his staff in his hand (32:10). But he had seen the Lord, and had been taught of Him the Way to heaven and God. Moreover, he had the promise of His presence and blessing all along the way. His fear of Esau and his longing for home were doubtless as nothing, compared with the joy of the Lord that had become very real to him at Bethel. Little wonder he "lifted up his feet" in light-hearted expectancy as he left Bethel to go to his Uncle Laban's home in Haran.

"Then Jacob went (Heb., 'lifted up his feet') on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east" (29:1).

The course of this journey took him over the route by which his grandfather, Abraham, had travelled when, many years previously, he had gone from Chaldea to the land of Canaan. Haran, the home of Laban, Rebekah's brother, was north and east of the Euphrates River, in Padan-aram, or Mesopotamia. It was north of Syria proper, which was also called "Aram." Laban himself was known as "Laban the Syrian" (Gen. 31:20).

### JACOB AT HARAN

Genesis 29:2—31:13

1. *Jacob's Meeting with Rachel*, 29:2-12. The details of this long and difficult journey are not given us; for immediately we read of Jacob's arrival at Haran, of his conversation with the shepherds at the well, and of his meeting with Rachel, Laban's daughter, who was to become Jacob's wife. This was no accidental meeting that Jacob had with Rachel; it was the result of definite guidance by God Himself. Let us read verses 2-12 carefully for all the details of the story.

We are told that the shifting sands and the strong evaporation made it necessary to cover the well of that country with a large, flat stone, in the center of which was cut a hole big enough for the drawing of water. Over this hole a heavy stone was rolled, to be removed only when all the sheep were gathered together for a drink. When Jacob arrived at this particular well that day in Haran, he found

three flocks of sheep lying by it, with their shepherds waiting for Rachel and her father's sheep before rolling away the stone.

It was customary for the unmarried daughters of even the greater sheiks to care for their fathers' flocks. And the morals of the people were such that Rachel, though beautiful, was safe from harm.

Something of Jacob's courtesy is seen in his meeting with Rachel. Something also of his affectionate nature is manifested upon his finding one of his own kindred. Four times in verses 10-12 his mother is mentioned—and Jacob was her favorite son; his thoughts must have turned toward home.

“And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept. And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother (i. e., kinsman), and that he was Rebekah's son: and she ran and told her father.”

2. *Jacob's Arrival in Laban's Home*, 29:13, 14. It had been many years since Laban had sent his sister, Rebekah, away to become the bride of Isaac. If Jacob was about seventy-seven when he fled from Esau, as Bible historians tell us, it had been some ninety-seven years since the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah, for they had waited twenty years for the promised son and heir. What communications, if any, may have passed between Laban and Rebekah during those intervening years—almost a century—we are not told. In any case, there must have been much to talk about when Jacob arrived in Laban's home; and he seems to have received a warm welcome.

“And it came to pass, when Laban heard the tidings of Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house. And he told Laban all these things. And Laban said to him, Surely thou art my bone and my flesh.”

And he abode with him the space of a month" (29:13, 14).

3. *Jacob's Marriage to Leah and Rachel*, 29:15-30. In the bitter experience of Jacob's dealings with Laban, the patriarch learned that "trickery can be met with trickery," that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." "The deceiver was deceived." God was permitting Jacob to suffer retribution for his own hypocrisy in his former dealings with his brother. It had to come, for Jacob's own good, that he might be convicted of sin, and chastened for a greater service than he had ever known. Before he was born, God had said to his mother, "The elder shall serve the younger." Jacob was to be served. Yet now he himself knew the drudgery of a hired servant; a shepherd, caring for another's sheep, only to be rewarded by his master's taking unfair advantage of him when his wages were due.

The story is familiar to us all. Jacob agreed to serve Laban seven years for the hand of Rachel, whom he must have loved from the time he first saw her. "Rachel was beautiful and well favored. And Jacob loved Rachel. . . . And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her" (29:17, 18, 20). But Laban had an older daughter, Leah, who was "tender eyed" (29:17); and it was the custom in his country that the older sister be married first. We are told that, even to this day in Arabia, the same custom prevails, often the same trickery being used to accomplish the purpose, the long bridal veil concealing the features of the bride throughout the first day of the week's marriage festivities.

From 29:27, 28 we learn that Jacob's marriage to Rachel took place the next week, although Jacob had to serve Laban yet other seven years for her. "And he loved Rachel more than Leah" (29:30). Moreover, to each daughter the father gave a servant-woman, both of whom became Jacob's concubines. What a source of envy and jealousy, of discord and strife! Polygamy and concubinage! The custom of the times allowed it, but not so the will of God. Isaac had only one wife and no concubines; Jacob knew better; but Jacob had very much to learn concerning a life fully yielded to the will of God.

4. *The Birth of Eleven of Jacob's Sons, 29:31—30:24.* During Jacob's twenty years in Haran, eleven of his twelve sons were born. God makes even the wrath of man to praise Him. And, as someone has pointed out, He overruled and used even the domestic strife and envy and jealousy in Jacob's home to "build up Jacob's family." These sons became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel; that is why the section of the story before us is one of the most important in the whole life of Jacob. Not only so, but these twelve tribes of Israel, which sprang from Jacob's twelve sons, have played a greater part in the history of the world than any other nation or people of all time. Israel is God's chosen people. Israel gave to the world the Redeemer and the Word of God. One day, through Israel, Christ will rule in righteousness and peace. And Israel's twelve tribes were named after Jacob's twelve sons. If you do not know these names from memory, my friend, be sure to learn them; for very much of Bible history and prophecy has to do with these significant names.

If you have a Scofield Reference Bible, you will note from the margin the meaning of these twelve names, bestowed upon these sons because of the circumstances connected with their birth. We list them here, asking the reader to compare their meaning with the story as recorded in the Scripture text. "Reuben" means "see, a son"; "Simeon," "hearing"; "Levi," "joined"; "Judah," "praise"; "Dan," "judging"; "Naphtali," "wrestling"; "Gad," "a troop"; "Asher," "happy"; "Issachar," "hire"; "Zebulun," "dwelling"; "Joseph," "adding."

It will be noted also that Jacob's only daughter, Dinah, was born to Leah during their stay in Haran. Her tragic story comes later in the record, in chapter thirty-four.

Jacob's twelfth and last son was born after his return to Bethel, on the way to Bethlehem. Rachel died when he was born. "And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing . . . that she called his name Ben-oni (i. e., 'son of sorrow'): but his father called him Benjamin," which means "son of my right hand" (35:16-18). Again, we quote from the footnote of the Scofield Reference Bible a deeply spiritual lesson connected with the name of this youngest son of Jacob:

"Benjamin, 'son of sorrow' to his mother, but 'son of my right hand' to his father, becomes thus a double type of Christ. As Ben-oni He was the suffering One, because of whom a sword pierced His mother's heart (Luke 2:35); as Benjamin, head of the warrior tribe (Gen. 49:27), firmly joined to Judah, the kingly tribe (Gen. 49:8-12; I Kings 12:21), he becomes a type of the victorious One. It is noteworthy that Benjamin was especially honoured among the Gentiles (Gen. 45:22)." As a type of Christ, "Joseph is most complete, Benjamin standing only for Christ the sorrowful One (Isa. 53:3, 4), yet to have power on earth."

5. *Jacob's Prosperity and Laban's Envy and Deceit*, 30:25—31:2. The shrewd bargaining between Laban and Jacob, the advantage each took of the other, and the envy of Laban and his sons of Jacob's prosperity show us something of the wickedness of the human heart. After the birth of Joseph, Jacob said unto Laban,

"Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country. Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee, and let me go: for thou knowest my service which I have done thee" (30:25, 26).

"And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake" (30:27).

God had been prospering Laban because Jacob was with him. Evidently Jacob was a thrifty, shrewd man; and, as he told Laban later, he had been careful to safeguard his uncle's flocks and herds, even through drought and frost, by day and by night (31:38-40). But now, after the birth of Joseph, he wanted to return to the land of Canaan. Upon Laban's urgent request that he stay, Jacob asked for appointed wages; for the question he raised did need to be answered, "When shall I provide for mine own house also?" (30:30).

Laban agreed to the bargain made with Jacob, doubtless believing that it would be to his own advantage. Then Jacob met deceit with deceit, and the story which follows, in

30:31-43, shows plainly that Jacob was still grasping, scheming, serving his own purposes, even at the expense of others. In spite of his unprincipled scheming, God prospered him, according to His promise; for we read in 30:43:

“And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses.”

Then Laban’s sons envied Jacob, causing their father’s attitude to change toward his nephew.

“And he heard the words of Laban’s sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all that was our father’s; and of that which was our father’s hath he gotten all this glory. And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before” (31:1, 2).

Once again we are reminded of God’s grace. He blessed and used Jacob in spite of Jacob’s selfishness and sin, at the time letting the deceiver be deceived, to teach him that such practices may not go on without the sure retribution that follows. Perhaps, too, God was allowing these unpleasant circumstances to prepare Jacob for his return to Canaan, to make him want to go back to the land of promise. From whatever angle we view the story, we see the abounding grace of the God of patience and love.

6. *God’s Call to Jacob to Return to Bethel*, 31:3, 11-13. If God had spoken to Jacob when he first asked Laban to let him return to Canaan, following the birth of Joseph, the record does not mention it. But now, after the full twenty years of the patriarch’s stay in Haran, God did speak to him saying,

“Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee” (31:3).

This must have been the appearance of the Lord to Jacob to which he referred when he related to Rachel and Leah the story in some detail (31:11-13). He had called his wives unto him in the field, had told them of their father’s estrangement toward him, of his service to Laban in spite of the fact that he had changed Jacob’s wages ten times, and of God’s



blessing throughout all the years of toil and service. As the verses which follow indicate, Jacob was evidently asking his wives if they would flee with him from their father's house, to go to the land of Canaan. And let it be said here, to Jacob's credit, that he did give God the glory for prospering him, even when Laban had dealt deceitfully with him. Note his words in verses 5, 7, 9:

"The God of my father hath been with me. . . . God suffered him (Laban) not to hurt me. . . . Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me."

Then it was that Jacob told Rachel and Leah how God had called him back to Bethel, saying to him, in part:

"I am the God of Beth-el, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred" (31:13).

This brings to a close Jacob's twenty years at Haran. During all this time we read nothing of his having built an altar to the Lord, nothing of his having prayed. This is not to say that Jacob did not pray or remember Jehovah throughout those twenty years. But it does seem that his heart had been set upon material things, earthly blessing and prosperity. But God is ever faithful; and He was ready to lead Jacob back to the land of promise, ready to reveal Himself to His erring child in another miraculous manner as he returned to the land of covenant blessing.

#### JACOB'S FLIGHT AND LABAN'S PURSUIT

Genesis 31:14-42

Perhaps it was well that Jacob fled from Laban unawares, for it is evident that Laban would have made trouble, had he known his nephew's plans. Perhaps Jacob took advantage of Laban in stealing away as he did. Perhaps he showed a lack of faith in God, who would have taken his part against Laban. But at least he did obey God in setting his face toward Canaan. And it may have been God's will for him to

go without consulting the selfish man who would doubtless have sought to hinder Jacob from obeying God's express command.

Certainly God called Jacob back to Bethel; and surely it was He alone who made Jacob's wives willing to go from their father's house to a strange country. They had seen their father's changed attitude toward Jacob. And they seem to have considered the command of Jacob's God; for they said, "Whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do" (31:16). Yet Rachel stole her father's images, and took them with her! (31:19, 30, 32-35).

When Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Jacob "fled with all that he had; and he rose up, and passed over the river (Euphrates), and set his face toward mount Gilead" (31:19-21). It was in mount Gilead that Laban overtook Jacob, a distance of about three-hundred and fifty miles from Haran, still on the east of the River Jordan.

"And it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob was fled. And he took his brethren with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey; and they overtook him in mount Gilead. And God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said unto him, Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad" (31:22-24).

But Laban did overtake Jacob and speak to him reproachfully of his flight from Haran. It seems hardly probable that he would have sent Jacob and his family and possessions away with mirth and gladness, as he said. But he did obey the voice of God in not harming Jacob—God saw to that! Then followed the accusation about the theft of his gods, and his failure to find them in Rachel's tent. These images, called "teraphim" in the Hebrew, were "small images of human figures, used not as idols or objects of worship, but as talismans, for superstitious purposes" (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown).

The angry words which followed might have led to blows, had God not been watching over Jacob. After having reminded Laban of his faithful service of twenty years, through drought and frost, by day and night, against wild beast and against thief, Jacob added:

"Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times. Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight" (31:41, 42).

#### THE COVENANT BETWEEN JACOB AND LABAN

Genesis 31:43-55

Still Laban contended that Jacob's wives and children and cattle belonged to him, but he dared not go contrary to the Word of God. Therefore, he suggested a covenant, as a witness that neither one should pass over the heap of stones which they erected to do the other harm. That is why the place was called Mizpah, meaning "beacon" or "watch-tower"; for Laban said, "The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another" (31:49). The Christian Endeavorers have adopted this as their benediction; but it was really a witness that God Himself would guard these two, neither of whom trusted the other. It signifies jealousy, suspicion, and distrust. Laban gave the place a Chaldean name; Jacob, a Hebrew name; both mean "the heap of witness" (31:47).

Following the oath of the covenant, the last tie that bound Jacob to Padan-aram was severed; and Laban returned home, for we read in 31:54, 55:

"Then Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mount. And early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them: and Laban departed, and returned unto his place."

#### "THE ANGELS OF GOD MET" JACOB

Genesis 32:1, 2

Jacob was on his way back to Bethel at last! Back to the "House of God" and blessing!

“And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God’s host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim” (i. e., “two hosts, or bands”) (32:1, 2).

Twenty years previously Jacob had seen “the angels of God ascending and descending” upon the ladder that pointed on to Christ. He had also seen “the Lord” standing above it. And now, after twenty years of striving and scheming, on his way back to the place where he first saw the Lord, “the angels of God met him” again. When he had left the Promised Land, he had seen the angels; and now, as he had his face set toward Bethel once more, they meet him on the way. How good is our God! To send His “ministering spirits” and ours, to encourage us on our pilgrim walk! We can not see these heavenly beings as Jacob saw them; but we take God at His Word, and know that they are guarding us from harm and danger, ministering unto us throughout our earthly lives.

And Jacob called the name of that place where the angels of God met him “Mahanaim.” Two interpretations of the meaning of this name have been suggested: (1) That the “two hosts, or bands” were “the visible band of Jacob, his family, and his earthly possessions, and the invisible band of God’s holy angels”; and (2) that “two hosts or bands” of angels were seen by Jacob, one going before him, as if to protect him from Esau’s wrath, and one behind him, as if to shield him from Laban’s envy and jealousy. In either case, Jacob saw “the angels of God” at a time when he needed divine help; for he was in great fear of his brother—after twenty years! Following this vision from heaven, he should not have been afraid; yet we see him afterwards, scheming, devising means to appease his brother, whom he had wronged. He was very much afraid, even after “the angels of God met him.” Yet he was human; and who are we, to find fault with Jacob for his fears? We, too, worry and fret, even after God has told us in a thousand ways to cast every care upon Him, for He careth for us. (See I Peter 5:7.) The same God who went before Israel in a pillar of cloud by day

and of fire by night moved and stood behind His people when Pharaoh pursued them to the Red Sea; thus He stood between Israel and her mortal enemy. And He stands between us and Satan and all his hosts. He sends His holy angels to "minister" unto us, "the heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14).

### JACOB'S FEAR OF ESAU

Genesis 32:3-8

It was not easy to get back to Bethel. It had been much easier to go from Bethel, as Jacob had "lifted up his feet" in eager expectancy of what the future held for him. Between Jacob and Bethel there was Esau. Nor is it easy for us, my Christian friend, to recover lost ground. But thank God, Bethel is always there! Jacob was a long time getting back to Bethel, even after the angels and the Lord Himself had met him and dealt with him. He delayed the keeping of his vow, and suffered bitter sorrow from the unspeakable sins of some of his children, before he finally returned to Bethel. Why? Because of his lack of immediate obedience. May the Lord help us to learn well this lesson from the life of Jacob. May we keep very close to the God of Bethel.

Let us read Gen. 32:3-8 to note how very much Jacob feared Esau. He sent a message to his brother, who twenty years earlier had threatened to kill him because he had stolen the blessing. In this message he made no claims to the benefits of the birthright; rather, he seems to have assured Esau that he had enough of his own possessions, that he was not seeking their father's inheritance in flocks and herds and servants. He told the messengers to ask Esau if he might "find grace" in his sight. It was a polite, cordial announcement of his return home. This message Jacob sent to Esau in "the land of Seir, the country of Edom" (i. e., Esau).

A glance at the map will remind us that the land of the Edomites was east and south of the Dead Sea and the land of Canaan. Possibly because of his own "roving nature," possibly because his heathen wives were out-of-place in the environment near Isaac, Esau had left Canaan. Gen. 36:7

tells us that the riches and cattle of Jacob and Esau "were more than that they might dwell together." And back of any immediate reason for his departure from that land of promise was the sovereign will of God. Jehovah had given the land to Jacob; and now upon his return, Jacob found Esau altogether out of the way.

Jacob was "greatly afraid" when he heard the report of the messengers he had sent to greet his brother; for they told him that Esau was going to meet him "and four hundred men with him."

"Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands; and said, if Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape" (32:7, 8).

To Jacob's guilty conscience there must have been some such accusation as this, "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23), although these very words were not written until many years later.

#### JACOB'S PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE FROM ESAU

Genesis 32:9-12

Poor Jacob was like many of God's children, slow to pray until he faced trouble. With no record of his having prayed for twenty years, with no mention of the altar, the tent, and the pilgrimage to a "better country," he finally went to God for help in time of great need. How much he had missed, in waiting until he was driven to prayer as a last resource! God's children who are walking very near to Him love to pray, love to hold communion with Him at all times.

This is the first recorded, personal prayer in the Bible. Abraham's prayer for Lot and Sodom had been one of intercession. Jacob's was for a very personal need. Let us study it carefully, that it may teach us some valuable lessons in prayer.

First, Jacob claimed the covenant promises of God, addressing Him as the God of Abraham and Isaac. Then he recalled God's promises and instructions to him during his

stay in Haran. With true humility at last, he admitted that he was "not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth" which God had showed unto him. He recalled how he had crossed over Jordan on his way to Haran with only his shepherd's staff in hand, now to return with great possessions. Having prayed for deliverance from Esau, he reminded God of His promise to make of him a great nation, asking protection for "the mother with the children." If the children were destroyed, then how would the nation come into being? So Jacob reasoned with God. So his faith took hold of the promises of God. And God heard his prayer. Did Jacob deserve an answer? Do you and I deserve God's answer to our prayers, my friend? Only His matchless grace could answer faltering, scheming, grasping Jacob. And only His matchless grace can hear and answer the prayers of our own faithless hearts. Always "He abideth faithful!"

#### JACOB'S PRESENT TO ESAU

Genesis 32:13-23

It was an exceedingly valuable gift that Jacob sent to Esau, skilfully arranged, to impress his brother with his generosity, as well as with his independence of any possessions their father had. Someone has counted the head of cattle, five-hundred and fifty in all, of different kinds, such as would be most desired by Esau. "The milch camels alone, of immense value, were the principal part of the Arab's wealth, as their milk was the chief article of diet" (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown). By putting "a space betwixt drove and drove," by commanding each servant to say the same words of humility and grace to Esau, Jacob hoped to "appease him with the present." "And afterward," he added, "I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me."

"So went the present over before him: and himself lodged that night in the company. And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two women-servants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had. And Jacob was left alone . . ." (32:21-24).

Jacob is often accused of still scheming, rather than trusting God, in sending this present to Esau. That may be the right interpretation to put upon his actions; perhaps not. God expects us to use discretion in dealing with our fellow-men. Did He also want Jacob to lay all upon the altar, so to speak? Did He want him, in some measure, to manifest a generous spirit toward his brother, whom he had wronged? Yet let it be remembered that only the grace of God, and not Jacob's clever devices, changed Esau's heart from hatred and intent to kill to gracious forgiveness—even until he "ran to meet" Jacob, "and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept" (33:4). Only the grace of God did that!

At last Jacob was on his way back to Bethel; and to arrive there, he had been compelled to meet Esau. Before he could know God's best blessing, he had to be reconciled to his brother, to "live at peace with all men." Jacob's new nature was beginning to assert itself, for he wanted what God had for him. He could have gone to some other place; he need not have returned to Laban, in any event. But Jacob's heart, touched by the Lord, wanted what the covenant blessing involved. That is why God was so patient with Jacob; in spite of his sin and selfishness, Jacob did want God's best. And that night, after he had crossed the ford Jabbok, he was "left alone," yet not alone; for once more God met him—and what a meeting!

#### JACOB AT PENIEL

Genesis 32:24-32

When did God meet Jacob, the carnal believer? When he had placed all upon the altar. Esau might have taken everything, so far as Jacob knew. But he was determined to go back to Bethel. He might have to go back empty-handed, but he was going all the way. And God gave back to Jacob his family, his riches, ever-increasing blessing. No one stands debtor to God! And Jacob himself became "Israel" that night, "a prince with God."

Some have seen in this experience of Jacob at Peniel a picture of his wrestling all night in prayer to God. But that is



not the picture at all. The Man, who was the Lord Himself in angelic form, wrestled with Jacob—not Jacob with the Man—“until the breaking of the day.” God was teaching Jacob not to continue to depend upon his own strength; therefore, He “touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob’s thigh was out of joint.” When? When Jacob still struggled, when the Lord “saw that he prevailed not against him,” when Jacob still wanted his own will and way. Jacob had to learn his own weakness, his own sin. He had schemed for the birthright and the blessing; he had tried to out-wit Laban; now he wrestled with God. Only after he became lame, utterly helpless in his own strength, did he learn to cling to God! Only then did he cast himself utterly upon the Lord—it took all night, after many years of going astray. But from this time on, Jacob was a spiritual man, consecrated, depending upon God, trusting God. Of course, he sinned again; he did not even go immediately to Bethel; such is the frailty of the flesh. But he possessed the land; and in his heart of hearts Jacob was changed. “Jacob,” the “supplanter,” had become “Israel,” “a prince with God.” Not only would he prevail over Esau, his immediate foe; but he had also prevailed with God. He would not let God go until he had received the blessing. “And he blessed him there.”

“And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for  
I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved  
. . . and the sun rose upon him.”

What a morning! What a sun-rising! The sun will always shine upon the child of God who learns to cling to Him, who ceases to struggle for self-will, for personal advantage, for carnal desires. We have already seen that “Peniel” means “The face of God.” Jacob was progressing in his spiritual life. From “The house of God” to a long, wayward walk “afar off,” he had at last met God face to face. He had learned that the land of promise was not to be possessed by his own devices, even as the Holy Spirit wrote many years later, saying, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:6). “Jacob had failed, but Israel won the victory.” And the name God

gave to Jacob that night became the name of the nation, through whom the Saviour was born, through whom the Word of God was given to a sinning world.

Jacob was a prince; yet he was lame the remainder of his life.

"Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank" (32:32).

Often God has to make us lame, as it were, in order to make us useful to Him. Sometimes He has to take away our most prized possessions before He can lead us on to the fulness of blessing. But His promise is sure,

"He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength" (Isaiah 40:29).

The "thorn in the flesh" which He permits is but to prove His "sufficient grace" (II Cor. 12:1-9).

#### GOD'S DELIVERANCE OF JACOB FROM ESAU

Genesis 33:1-16

How human Jacob was as, the next morning, he went to meet Esau! He gave to each mother her own children, put the two handmaids and their children first, in the place of any possible danger; then Leah and her sons and daughters; and last of all, in the safest place, Rachel and Joseph, the best loved.

"And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother" (33:3).

Call it fawning if you will; some do. It seems that humility would be a better word. And perhaps it was an oriental way of showing deference to one who was to be honored. Whatever fear may have remained in Jacob's heart, God answered his prayer. Surely Esau could not have been afraid of a lame man! And his running to meet his brother, his embrace, his kiss, and his tears were but the tokens of the miracle which God had wrought in his long-angry heart.

The wives and children and servants of Jacob bowed before Esau. The two brothers talked one with the other, Esau finally accepting the costly gift from the hand of Jacob, though he manifested a most generous spirit. To God Jacob gave the glory, saying, "God hath dealt graciously with me" (33:11).

Esau offered to journey with Jacob, going on before, possibly to afford protection. But Jacob chose to separate from his brother. Was he still somewhat afraid of him? Did he think it the part of wisdom to go from him, lest unforeseen strife arise? "So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir" (33:16). Jacob's prayer had been answered!

JACOB AT SHECHEM—THE AWFUL CONSEQUENCES OF SIN  
Genesis 33:17—34:31

"And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him an house, and made booths for his cattle: therefore the name of the place is called Succoth. And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan-aram; and pitched his tent before the city. And he bought a parcel of a field . . . for an hundred pieces of money" (33:17-19).

These are the places to which Jacob went first after having crossed the Jordan River: for Mizpah, where he had bade Laban farewell; Mahanaim, where "the angels of God" had met him; Peniel, where he had "seen God face to face"—these were all on the east of Jordan, just north of the River Jabbok. And now Jacob crossed over Jordan and "journeyed to Succoth." Thus he went north from Peniel; yet Bethel was toward the south. How long he stayed in Succoth we do not know, but he "built him an house, and made booths for his cattle" there. That does not indicate that he was very eager to return to Bethel to keep his vow. He did go toward Bethel when he later went to Shalem, a city of Shechem; but that was still some thirty miles north of Bethel; and there he "bought a parcel of a field . . . for an hundred pieces of money." Thus Jacob was the first of the patriarchs, of whom it is written that he purchased property in Canaan. He was the first to leave "the tent" for "an house." He was

not the pilgrim his fathers had been; he settled among a people whose companionship led to shame and sin and murder in his own immediate family.

It was eight or ten years, some think longer, before Jacob finally went all the way back to Bethel. Ten years, only thirty miles from that place of the altar, "The house of God"! It took tragedy in his own household to arouse him to his need for complete obedience to the call of God. How slow Jacob was to obey! How slow to keep his vow to the Lord, who had been so good to him, so patient with him! And his incomplete obedience brought home to him the awful consequences of sin.

The story of that tragedy in his family is told in chapter thirty-four. It is the record of one of the darkest crimes ever committed, a chapter that we can not even read in a mixed audience. Yet we need to read it, to see the awful fruition of sin.

Jacob's only daughter, Dinah, Leah's child, "went out to see the daughters of the land" (34:1). That was a dangerous thing to do, to associate with evil companions for pleasure or personal satisfaction; for the people of Shechem were idolatrous. Where was Jacob all this time? Why was he not safeguarding his only daughter?

Dinah was doubtless flattered by the attentions of "Shechem, the son of . . . the prince of the country." But God's will has ever been the same in every age for His children; they must live a life separated from the godless world, even as He said through Paul, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (II Cor. 6:14). Had Abraham and Isaac not been very careful that their sons of promise not marry the heathen people of the land? Had Isaac not been grieved because Esau had married two heathen women?

But even the sin of Shechem will not compare, at least to human eyes, with the diabolical conspiracy of two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, against the men of Shechem. Double-dealing, unfair advantage, wholesale murder, thievery, and pillage were the satanic "instruments" of their "cruelty." No wonder the curse of God was pronounced upon them, when Jacob, guided by the Holy Spirit, uttered

his great prophecy concerning the twelve tribes of Israel, saying, in part:

“Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel” (Gen. 49:5-7).

No wonder Jacob rebuked Simeon and Levi for troubling him, for causing him “to stink among the inhabitants of the land,” for leading him to fear, lest he and his family be destroyed by a justly indignant host around him. (See 34:30.)

We need not dwell longer on this cruel, shameful scene; but we do need to remember that retribution is sure to follow sin. While God has forgiven us of the guilt of sin, while Christ bore our judgment before His holy Father when He suffered the shameful death of the cross; yet the result of sin, the fearful consequences of sin, will come home to us. There is a vast difference between the punishment for sin and the result of sin. I have known Bible teachers to fall from their high places of service in a moment of folly. I have seen them return to the ministry utterly forgiven by the God of grace; yet ever afterwards they have been hindered in their testimony, in their usefulness in the Lord’s work. Jacob’s twenty years afar off from God, and his continued delay in returning to the place of the altar, found his own children steeped in sin and shame and disgrace. May God help us, Christian parents of this day, to safeguard our boys and girls! We can not do it unless we ourselves are fully yielded to God’s will for our own lives.

#### BACK TO BETHEL AT LAST

Genesis 35:1-15

It took real trouble to drive Jacob all the way back to Bethel. It took also another call from God, another reminder of Jacob’s earlier vow.

**"And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there . . ."**

It was not enough for Jacob to return to Bethel; he was told to "dwell there."

**"Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother" (35:1).**

As a result of this repeated call from God, Jacob bade his family "put away the strange gods" among them, shameful acknowledgment of the depths of sin into which his household had sunk. "And Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem." Having cleansed themselves from the defilement of heathenism, his household went with Jacob, even as God had commanded.

Perhaps all connected with this family were eager to get away from Shechem, for fear of the people whose revenge they sought to escape. And it was just at this time that God called to Jacob, bidding him go. Nor did God permit him or his family to be slain by the enemy; indeed, He worked a miracle on their behalf—not that they deserved it, but that the promised nation might be established. Some supernatural power, protecting this family, was evident, as 35:5 plainly indicates:

**"And they journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob."**

Having arrived at Bethel, Jacob built an altar, as God had commanded, and called the place by a new name, "El-beth-el"; that is, "The God of the house of God." Surely the memory of his first night at that place must have come back to him—that night when, as a wanderer, his head upon a stone, he had seen the Lord and the ladder which pointed on to Christ, the "angels of God ascending and descending upon it." But now it was the God of that place whom he sought to honor, "The God of the house of God."

There Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died and was buried. This is the first mention of her name, but she had gone with Rebekah on that journey to Canaan, when the latter had

been chosen to become the bride of Isaac. (See Gen. 24:58.) Just when she became a member of Jacob's household, we are not told. She must have been of a great age. And now another tie with Jacob's former life was broken; an honored and beloved member of the household, his own mother's nurse, was buried beneath "The oak of weeping," or "Allonbachuth."

At Bethel "God appeared unto Jacob again . . . and blessed him," emphasizing the significance of his new name, "Israel"; reminding him of His own almighty power; once more promising the nation that was to come into being, a nation from which kings should arise, yea, even the King of kings; and promising yet again the land of Canaan as that nation's earthly inheritance. It was the confirmation of the Abrahamic covenant. What more could Jacob ask? God had given it to him at Bethel, when Jacob had first left the land of promise. And now, after many years of self-will and half-hearted obedience, God reaffirmed this covenant. Why? Because He is the God of grace, and because He always keeps His Word. Men's covenants are often mere scraps of paper. Who believes the word of a Hitler or a Stalin? But God's Word is eternal; it can not be broken.

"And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him, even a pillar of stone: and he poured a drink-offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon. And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him Beth-el" (35:14, 15).

#### THE DEATH OF RACHEL AND THE BIRTH OF BENJAMIN

Genesis 35:16-20

God had told Jacob to "dwell" at Bethel; but he "journeyed from Beth-el. . . ." And on the way to Bethlehem Rachel died when Benjamin was born.

"And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day" (35:20).

When Moses wrote these words, that pillar was still standing. Today a "Mohammedan monument of solid masonry" covers this site.

In our study of Jacob's life in Haran we considered the very important fact of the birth of his eleven sons, noting also this part of the story before us now, in which we read of the birth of Benjamin. We need only remind ourselves just here that this "son of sorrow" and "son of my right hand" is but a faint picture of the "Man of Sorrows" who is even now seated at the right hand of God, in the place of authority and power. He is none other than Jacob's God, your Saviour and mine. Jacob loved Him, in spite of his wilful ways; and his faith saved his soul and led him on to glory, into the presence of the Christ of God. Surely Jacob could take none of the glory or honor to himself. Neither can you. Neither can I, my Christian friend.

"And Israel journeyed" again, returning to Isaac, his father, at Hebron. But before we read of his meeting with Isaac, we note the record of another sin of yet another son, Reuben (35:22). God tells the whole story, to show "the exceeding sinfulness of sin" and the abounding grace of God. Once more the twelve sons are named (35:23-26). They are important, for the reason we well know; their names were given to the twelve tribes of Israel; hence the repetition here.

### THE DEATH OF ISAAC

Genesis 35:27-29

The death of Isaac "is here recorded by anticipation, for it did not take place till fifteen years after Joseph's disappearance." Doubtless the Holy Spirit placed it, as well as "the generations of Esau," here to round out the details not closely associated with the story of Joseph, which begins in chapter thirty-seven. For Joseph fills the scene from that point on to the end of the book of Genesis.

Jacob found his father dwelling at Hebron, which means "fellowship." You remember that Isaac represents son-ship. As a type of the Son of God and Heir of all things, Isaac now is in the place of unbroken fellowship with God, in Hebron, the place of joy and blessing. It is a wonderful place for us to be at all times.



Isaac lived to be "an hundred and fourscore years" old. Then he "was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days: and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him." Here is another beautiful touch; these sons who had been estranged for many years now mourned together the loss of their father. And they buried him in the cave of Machpelah, where Abraham and Sarah had been buried (Gen. 49:31).

### "THE GENERATIONS OF ESAU"

36:1-43

Only one other record remains before the story of Joseph fills the scene, that of the descendants of Esau, who was called Edom. It covers all of chapter thirty-six. Verses 6, 7 show how God abundantly fulfilled His promise, uttered through Isaac, of material blessing upon Esau; and they show also one real reason why this son of Isaac left Canaan to dwell in the land of Seir. Of course, God's hand was in it, causing the riches and much cattle of both brothers to be so great that they could not dwell together in the land of Canaan. God meant for Jacob to have Canaan.

The word translated "dukes" throughout this chapter really means "heads of families or clans." We are not to think of them as of high rank, like the British peers of our own day. But that the Edomites became a powerful nation is seen, not only in verse 31 of this chapter, where reference is made to their kings, but also throughout Israel's history we read of them and of their enmity against God's chosen people.

Of the closing years of Jacob's life we shall have much to say as we study the life of Joseph. Even after this beloved son was sold into Egypt, twenty years passed before Jacob took his family and journeyed to Egypt. And having arrived there, he lived for seventeen more years in the presence of his favorite son, surrounded by those who loved and honored him. His was a long, eventful life, guarded and shaped and shielded and disciplined by the God of all grace and love.

### JACOB—A TYPE OF ISRAEL, THE NATION

As we look back over the years of Jacob's life, from birth to Bethel, from Bethel to Peniel, and back to Bethel, we see

a typical picture of the nation that is called by his name—Israel. His early life was spent in the land of promise; so was the early history of Israel. Jacob at Haran was out of the land of blessing, with no altar, no place of prayer; and he was envied and hated by others. Likewise, the nation of Israel, for many centuries dispersed among the Gentile nations of the world, has been out of her place of blessing; with no altar—for she refused the only altar, which is Calvary's Cross; envied, hated, despised; yet marvelously preserved by her covenant-keeping God. Jacob had no revelations of God during his stay in Haran; yet to him eleven sons and a daughter were born, and great riches were added unto him. So also Israel, having rejected her Messiah and King, has had no prophet, no vision or dream from heaven; yet she has been "multiplied as the dust while being trampled in it." And she holds the money-bags of the world. When Jacob returned to the land of promise, he possessed the land; God appeared to him again; and once more he became a pilgrim for God. When Israel is restored to Palestine, as she will surely be, she will possess the land promised to Abraham; she will know her Redeemer and King "by the print of the nails in His hands"; and she will be honored above all the nations of the earth. She has been in Haran, as it were, for many long centuries, hated, despised, "the people of the wandering feet." But she will go "back to Bethel," back to the house of her God; and she will see Him face to face. At present a castaway among the nations, yet the Jew is born to rule. To Israel "pertaineth the adoption, and the glory . . ." (Rom. 9:4). Rome can not have this glory that God has promised to the Jew. Hitler can not have it. God has given it to Israel. And every promise He has made to His ancient people—and there of hundreds of such promises—every one He will fulfill.

Do you love the Jew, my friend? Do you "pray for the peace of Jerusalem," as God requires? They shall prosper that love Israel (Psalm 122:6). Jacob was not always lovable; neither is the Jew; but neither are you; neither am I. God loved Jacob; and He loves and blesses all who love

Jacob's people. Have you thanked Him for Israel's having given you your Saviour and your Bible? Have you prayed for the conversion of the millions in Israel who do not know their King? Have you given of your means, that they may hear that He died to save their souls? I ask myself these searching questions.

May the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob teach us, not only to avoid many of the pitfalls into which Jacob fell, but also to give the Gospel to Jacob's children, who today are more open-hearted than ever before, since Christ died, to hear of "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," even "the Lion of the tribe of Judah," who will one day rule "from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." (See John 1:29; Rev. 5:5; Psalm 72:8.)

