

Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17: 11)

**THE PILGRIMAGE OF JACOB
AND THAT OF THE BELIEVER**

VOLUME 51

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AND THAT OF THE BELIEVER

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EDITORIAL

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Jacob recognised the pilgrim-character of his life in both his early and his later years (Gen. 25: 27, 47: 9). To the natural man he was a simple nomad. But that way of life, harsh and archaic for its day, was the outward expression of his spiritual sojourn as explained later by the Holy Spirit (Heb, 11: 9-11, 13-16). The believer today is on a similar pilgrimage and may therefore look to see aspects of his own pilgrimage foreshadowed in that of Jacob (1 Peter 1: 17; 1 Peter 2: 11). In his later life Jacob was accompanied by his sons, the progenitors of the children of Israel. Their pilgrimage together foreshadows that of their descendants, who were a pilgrim people, separated to God (Lev. 25: 23). So today, the believer is to be a pilgrim not only in his individual life but also as one of God's present-day separated people (Heb. 13: 10-14).

Thus the natural man will see a tale, well told, in the story of Jacob, but the spiritual man, by comparing scripture with scripture and spiritual things with spiritual will see its true significance. Indeed it is one of the wonders of the book of Genesis that so many later, especially New Testament scriptures, correspond so exactly and illuminate the early verses so clearly. **For** example, **Ephes. 2: 11** exactly explains the contrast between Jacob and **Esau** brought to our attention in Gen. 25: 19-34. Esau submitted to that lust of **the** flesh called greed. Jacob, however, **is presented as** the plain or perfect man giving diligence to make his calling and election sure (2 Peter 1: 10). It is this last respect that makes the example of his life so valuable to us today. From his earliest days he had to struggle to overcome opposition to his fulfilling his divinely ordained role. Some of his difficulties were of his own making but others, perhaps most, arose from the faults of others. For these reasons alone there can be few readers of Bible Studies who do not feel themselves instantly " at home^M with Jacob and his strivings. The accurate assessment of responsibility, however, is one of the major lessons to be learned from the life of Jacob and, of course, enables the student to make

such assessments in his own life.

For example, this year's syllabus has been designed to bring out the distinction that the scriptures make between Jacob's behaviour as regards the birthright (Gen. 25: 26-34) and his behaviour as regards the blessing (Gen. 27: 1-29). No blame whatsoever is attached to Jacob in connection with the birthright* He is presented as the perfect man who obtained the birthright fairly and squarely by purchase. He bought - Esau sold. Esau being the kind of man he was it may be this was the only way Jacob could obtain what was his by divine right. There was certainly no likelihood that Esau would take the view of a Jonathan (1 Sam. 23: 17) or say a John the Baptist ^MHe that cometh after me is become before me: for he was (by divine election) before me", or ^MHe must increase, but I must decrease" (John 1: 15, 3: 30). Such is not the way of the natural man. Jacob's obtaining of the blessing was somewhat different as next month's study should show (D. V.).

I. E. P.

**THE PILGRIMAGE OF JACOB AND THAT OF THE BELIEVER -
THE NATURAL AND THE SPIRITUAL (Gen 25: 19-34).**

From Birkenhead: Our consideration of the passage was directed towards drawing lessons from the narrative and although Jacob was the prime subject, we noticed that the Lord was making His plan manifest before Jacob's birth. The scriptures clearly indicate that Isaac entreated the Lord that his wife might have a child. The time during which they had to wait upon the Lord is indeterminate, but a period of 20 years had elapsed between marriage and the birth of the children,

The hand of the Lord at work could be clearly seen by Isaac and Rebekah and it was obvious to them that the Lord had intervened in "natural" matters, having chosen the moment according to His wisdom. Additional to this* Rebekah, having spoken to the Lord, was told in advance that there was to be an order of events which would involve the younger taking the place and rights of the elder, and this was to be in accordance with the Lord's will. Further, it was made clear that the two children would be progenitors of separate nations and that the reversal of relationship would not only apply to the individuals, but also to the nations.

The birth of the twins is related in sufficient detail for us to learn that the younger had hold of the heel of the elder, and it was suggested that this might have indicated that the position of Esau, by virtue of his seniority was, even at this early stage, sought after by his younger brother.

The character of Jacob is described as that of a plain man, indicating that he responded to the responsibilities of home life, and elsewhere we read that he dwelt with his father and Abraham in the camp. Esau, however, was a hunter, and dwelt wherever his hunting led him, and as a man of the field is displayed as a lover of the world. Isaac and Rebekah each had their favourite and as such, the family seems to display characteristics which we should seek to avoid in our own lives, especially when it is observed that Jacob seemed to covet the birthright and Esau was willing to forego it [Comment 1].

We spent some time considering what was the equivalent situation of the believer, finding himself in the house of God today, to that of Esau. It is clear from scripture that eternal security is never in doubt, but it was considered that the saint's privileged position could be forfeited because he did not place a true valuation on that into which he has been called. [Yes, see Heb. 12: 16-29, Eds].

It is clear when the brothers are viewed in this light, that there were faults and failings on both sides [Comment 1]. Notwithstanding this, however, God clearly chose Jacob and demonstrated to others that this was so. We were left with the question as to why God chose him. All we were able to say was that God had clearly chosen him and that it was not attributable to any inherent goodness or appeal within the man. He was chosen before his birth, and in his life sought to fulfil his own desire without waiting on the Lord. [Comment 1]. These, thoughts were applied in consideration of our own situation as sinners saved by grace.

R. C. Halpin, R. D. Williams

From Birmingham: In our first study of Jacob we seem to have a comparison between Old Testament types of the "unregenerate" man and the "born again" man.

In order to see Jacob as a type of the "born again" or "spiritual" man, we need to analyse him against the backdrop of Esau's character, a type of the unregenerate man. From the very start, in fact as early as their conception, these two were to be so different.

The answer of God to Rebekah "Two peoples shall be separated even from thy bowels" (v. 23), meant that two nations, who would have nothing in common would be descended from her. The meaning of the word "separated" in the original implies that they would be radically different and would remain apart for ever. Even so, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is

Spirit", (John 3: 6); and "What fellowship have righteousness and iniquity. or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever?" (2 Cor. 6: 14, 15). The two are completely opposite to one another.

Our conclusion of Esau as a type of the ^Tnatural man¹ is drawn from the observation that he seemed to be completely void of faith. He had no spiritual appreciation, for he despised his birthright (v. 34), a spiritual inheritance which could have incurred many and various blessings; the birthright being his because he was the first-born (*cf.* Deut. 21: 15-17). However, the birthright would only mean something to him as he had faith to appreciate it, but he counted it as nothing for he said "What profit shall the birthright do to me?" (v. 32). In this sense he is a perfect type of the 'natural man' who "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged" (1 Cor. 2: 14). Paul also says that " they that are. after the flesh (the natural man) do mind the things of the flesh" Rom. 8: 5) and Esau for a momentary satisfying of a natural desire sold his birthright. He gave away and lost a spiritual heritage because of his spiritual short-sightedness and his desire for only the natural things. Total spiritual incapacity and no appreciation of spiritual values were shown. He should have realised that according to promise he was in the line from which one day the Messiah would spring (Gen. 21: 12) but what use was that to him when he was about to die, he thought. In this sense he was a ^fprofane person¹ (Heb. 12: 16). "Profane" in Greek is *bebelos*: that which lacks all relationship to God.

"Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field" (v. 27). "A cunning hunter" means "knowing hunting". He was a man of the open country, roving about everywhere. He loved activity and freedom, and consequently, he grew up to have an undisciplined character. It has been remarked that the continual pursuit of a life of hunting makes a person's character harsh, especially when it becomes an obsession. Here too he lived up to his general description for when Esau was born he was like "an hairy garment" (v. 25). In the word "hairy" (Heb: *sair*) there seems to be an allusion to the land of "Seir" where Esau later took up his dwelling (Gen. 36^e. 8), a land that was rough and wooded. Thus we have a record here of a child that was unusually rough and rugged.

And so, as we compare Jacob against Esau we see again right from the start how different they were. After Esau was born Jacob followed, "And his hand had hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob" (v. 26), "supplanter" (RVM). A supplanter is "one who

obtains things by devious measures", [Comment 1] What a contrast to Esau who would have obtained things by brute force!

"Jacob was a plain man dwelling in tents" (v. 27). The Hebrew word (*tarn* - plain) suggests simple; harmless; quiet or perfect. A man of peaceful habits, filling the requirements of his calling and not roving about. Being destined to a "nomadic life" he gave himself to the pursuits of that calling. But when we come to the selling of the birthright and the devious way in which it was obtained (vv. 29-34) we can fall into an apparent age-old misunderstanding of Jacob's character, that is, that Jacob was "all-wrong" and Esau was "all-right". Admittedly, Jacob's dealing of the matter is hard to understand but the scriptural point of view must be maintained: Esau was primarily to blame (v. 34) [Comment 1].

Jacob was really a spiritually minded man with spiritual values (Heb. 1: 21). His aspirations and spiritual aggressiveness regarding the birthright were probably begotten by the word of promise (v_a23), probably passed on to the sons by their mother, we suggest.

J. Watts

From Cowdenbeath: Jacob and Esau were seen to be different even before they were born. God chose Jacob. Divine election is not on the grounds of works but it is of Him that calleth (Rom. 9: 11). God is sovereign and it is His unchallengeable right to choose whom He will. In this He never acts unrighteously. Divine election and human accountability are incompatible to our finite minds. To the Infinite they are inseparable parts of one great whole.

The newly-born Esau is first described as being red or ruddy (RVM). The word is used of David (1 Sam. 16: 12; 17: 42). These are the only occurrences of the word in the Old Testament Perhaps, therefore, we should not think of Esau as being an unattractive child. Secondly, "he was all over like an hairy garment". His name means rough (sensibly felt: Dr. Strong). Because Rebekah found his skin rough to her touch she so named him. In his manhood he was given another name. To Jacob he said, "Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red" (RVM) "*therefore*" we read, "was his name called Edom which means red". His descendants were called Edomites (Gen. 36: 9) [Comment 2].

The name "Jacob" which means "heel-catcher, or supplanter" was given to him because he displayed the characteristic at birth. From the moment he was born he showed that he wanted to be first. As he grew up he learned that the birthright was essential to the

blessing. **He realized that he was not just an ordinary son in an ordinary family. He was the son of Isaac who, in turn, was the son of Abraham the man to whom God gave the promise of blessing through his seed. He desired that the blessing of Abraham should be his and this he did indeed receive before he left home to go in search of a wife (Gen. 28: 4).**

God does not fault Jacob for how **he obtained the birthright, but he faults Esau and holds him up as a warning to us. Both men were satisfied with the deal. Esau sold, Jacob bought. The seller did not realize the value of what he possessed and exchanged it for something which could give only temporary satisfaction. We are warned against doing likewise (Heb. 12: 16, 17).**

As men they were extremely different. Esau loved the excitement of the chase. He felt a deep sense of satisfaction in achieving his goal when he tracked down the prey, and, perchance, carried it home on his broad shoulders. He was the sort of man many would admire; a real man of the world, athletic and physically strong. Jacob, however, was no weakling (see Gen. 29: 2, 10; 32: 25). He is described as being a plain man (Heb: perfect RVM). In God's eyes he was a perfect or complete man. The fact that he was a tent-dweller shows that he confessed that he was a pilgrim and a stranger. A man who was but passing through the land looking for a better country, sharing with Abraham and Isaac the promise concerning the city which is to come and which God has prepared for them, i. e. the Holy City, the New Jerusalem for which we also look.

It is interesting to note by comparing Gen. 21: 5, 25: 7 and 25: 26 that Jacob was contemporary with Abraham for 15 years. Who can tell what influence the great man had upon his grandson?

J. Bowman

From **Derby: God's thoughts are not our thoughts and our ways are not his. (Isa. 55: 8). We were called^M with a holy calling.... according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal". (2 Tim. 1: 9). On the day of Pentecost we see, on the one side, the divine purpose and on the other side the human responsibility for what was done. It is hopeless for us to try to reconcile these in our minds.**

Rebekah's barrenness had lasted for twenty years. During this time Isaac was pleading for children and, while he had no heir, wondering about the purpose of his own life.

Abraham had two very different children, but they had two different mothers. Isaac had two very different children but they had the same mother. Rebekah asked the Lord why she was suffering so much and she was privileged to receive a direct answer from Him. So she knew even before they were born that the elder would serve the the younger.

The name Jacob signifies "one who follows at another's heels". It is Esau who, later, when he is angry, puts the emphasis on "supplanter" (27: 36) [Comment 3].

Esau grew up to love the outdoor life, and Isaac loved in Esau that which he lacked in himself. Jacob is described as a "plain" man which means "upright". His happiness was found in his home and so he was his mother's favourite. Esau was a profane man, that is one who sets no value on what is valued in heaven. The strong spiritual content did not appeal to him. The gruel meant more than being in the line that would lead to the Messiah. Jacob got the birthright by divine appointment [and by diligence - *Eds I*. The spiritual man valued what would come with the birthright blessing and looked far ahead. Jacob showed that his mind was set on this thing of spiritual value and the only way he could obtain it was to purchase it from his brother. Esau thought more of the trivial thing than the purposes of God. Every believer has a birthright of service and it is possible to set it aside for something trivial and show complete indifference to our spiritual privileges.

G. W. Conway

From Galston: Isaac intreated the Lord; Rebekah inquired of the Lord. Both prayers were answered for both approached the Almighty in a spirit of lowliness. Prayer is a spiritual exercise, a communion between the heart of man and the heart of his Creator. Prayer begins in the heart and is not simply an exercise of mind. Prayer never demands, for power belongs to God who gives as He wills. The leper worshipped the Lord Jesus. The centurion, man of great faith, "besought" the Lord. The blind man pleaded for mercy. Each was granted his request. Herod and the Pharisees ("Shew us a sign") were denied their request because of proud and hard hearts.

When Rebekah asked, "Wherefore am I thus?" (v. 22 RVM) she was experiencing a struggle between the elder and the younger which speaks of the struggle experienced by believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the struggle of the Spirit lusting against the flesh and the flesh lusting against the Spirit, i. e. the struggle between the old

and new natures. God has promised victory to **the new nature**, as He said of Isaac's sons, "**The elder shall serve the younger**". **The final triumph of the "younger"** will be seen in the **day** that our bodies are redeemed,, **Till then we must continue in the "good fight" and be able to say with Paul, "I have fought the fight"**.

Esau, the natural man, was a hunter, a man of great activity, a man of the field. No doubt **he would be popular for he would have many an adventure to relate.** Jacob, by contrast, **was a perfect or quiet man (RVM) dwelling in tents. Quietness is a precious spiritual quality.** Jacob **stayed at home - he was contented and "contentment with godliness is great gain"**. Jacob **had no compelling urge to roam.** Assuredly God **is pleased with men who are content to dwell in His house.** "**How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob. . . . which the Lord planted**".

Rebekah loved Jacob (no reason is given). Isaac loved Esau (a reason is given). Natural love fails **because it depends upon a reason.** **If the venison failed what reason was there for Isaac to love Esau?** The **sure foundation of God's love is not built on any reason or change in circumstance.** He says, "**the Lord... set His love upon you. . . . because the Lord loveth you (Deut. 7: 7-8).** **Rebekah loved Jacob, the spiritual way, because she loved him. Divine love makes the loved one inseparable from the loving one.**"^M**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8: 35).**

Whatever **may be said** about Jacob's later deception of **his father or his dealings with Laban we can see that Jacob treasured God's blessing and took account of this.** Both brothers **had no doubt heard of the promised inheritance from Abraham (Heb, 11: 9).** **Esau, the man of the field ("the field is the world") despised his birthright to spiritual blessing.** **The believer has old-nature tendencies which will lure him to the "field" at the expense of spiritual blessings unless he mortifies the flesh.** For **this we seek the grace of God.** There **is no middle way.**

James C. Johnson

From Liverpool: *Natural: Reactions.* None of **the characters in this story come out of it in a very good light.** Despite **faith and the special promises of God the human reactions of the participants are still very much in evidence.** It is a difficult thing to control **these human impulses and ideas and to allow God to work out His own purposes in our lives and those of our families [Comment 1].**

Natural: Schemings. The scheming of Rebekah and Jacob go hand in hand - the mother assured by God that Jacob would have the supremacy and the Son the inheritor of God's special promises and blessings together employing natural reasoning and sinful deceit to expedite the promises which they both evidently accepted by faith [Comment 1],

Natural: Opportunist? It is debatable whether Jacob was just making the most of his God-given opportunity in getting the blessing assigned to him by Esau or whether he was an opportunist taking unfair advantage of his brother's real or exaggerated state of hunger. We noted that Jacob could easily have been born first if God had so desired, but for some reason God chose to reverse the natural order subsequently. However, we are assured that God did not require Jacob's assistance in this [Comment 1].

Natural: Favouritism. it is sad there was favouritism at all within this family, and sadder still in the case of Isaac, that great man of faith, in his favouring of the elder son in spite of God's will and his determination to pass the blessing to him. It is inconceivable that he did not know of God's intention to reverse the roles of the two sons. Is this the case of an old man letting go of the faith to which he has held sincerely through his life?

Natural: Godlessness. Esau had no appreciation of spiritual things and despised the position as first-born and inheritor of the promises of God. Described in Hebrews as "profane" (12: 16) his energies and mind were set on the ordinary everyday things around him. He lived for the present and could see no value in those things which were of no material benefit to him.

Spiritual: Faith. This keyword is common to Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah and Jacob. Isaac's faith was such that believing God he was prepared to spend years praying to God on behalf of his childless wife. We can take all our problems to God confident that He will listen to us. Rebekah's faith was such that she spent her life arranging the family circumstances in readiness for the inheritance by the younger son; perhaps one of the reasons why she favoured him, and Jacob's faith proved itself over and over again in a life full of problems, sorrow and hardship.

Spiritual: Perception. Jacob realised and firmly believed that he had inherited from God promises which were exciting and important. The birthright included: 1. The rights to be a priest [Comment 4]. 2. The promises made in Eden and the royal line therefrom; 3. The

promise of blessing to all the earth (Gen. 12). Although none of these would be completely fulfilled until the coming of Jesus Christ, Jacob recognised in them an importance for himself in blessings and that he occupied a very privileged position in God's service.

Spiritual: Lessons for today.

1. There is a picture of the Christian struggle of the old nature against the new nature (We are not, of course, suggesting that Esau was chosen to be lost eternally I).
2. "Buy the truth and sell it not" (Prov. 23: 23). It is important to keep hold of truth: it is a very precious commodity which always keeps its value in a changeable world. See also 1 Tim. 6: 20.
3. As born-again believers we are inheritors of a birthright of service in God's house. This ought to lead every believer into God's house though sadly it does not. Some do not appreciate it, others let it go.

D. J. Webster

From Manchester: Several of the differences between the natural and the spiritual are displayed in the lives and characteristics of Esau and Jacob.

Esau was physically strong, a knowledgeable hunter, lacked self-control and, although a forgiving man, spiritual things were of little value to him. On the other hand Jacob was a plain, quiet man. Nevertheless he was subtle, scheming, calculating and impatient at times [Comment 1]. He had a greater sense of spiritual values and sought authority and divine blessing.

Before the twins were born God said that the elder would serve th. 3 younger (v. 23). Jacob should have waited on God's time for this purpose to be fulfilled. Instead Jacob used subtlety to obtain Esau's birthright [Comment 1]. Esau did not appreciate the value of his birthright (the privileges of the first-born, perhaps a "double portion", and social and religious authority) and gladly sold it to Jacob to satisfy his hunger.

There is no record of Jacob receiving a divine reprimand, but Jacob reaped what he had sown in that he was deceived by his uncle, Laban, (Gen. 29: 21-25) about his wife and wages, and later by his sons about Joseph (Gen. 37: 29. 34).

Lessons for the believer may be listed as follows:

1. Set a high priority on spiritual values.
2. Be careful not to despise things of spiritual value.
3. Nothing can impede God's purpose.
4. Some decisions once made cannot be revoked (Heb, 11).

- b. **The present is not as important as the future.**
6. **It is important to believe in a real spiritual destiny (2 Cor-4: 18).**
7. **Trivial things can be too important.**

R. McCormick, S. Verner

From Methil: As with the beginning of the believer's new life through faith in Christ, so we have outlined in this portion the beginning of the privilege of Jacob.

A state of conflict between the "natural" and the "spiritual" as embodied in the characteristics of the two brothers is evident, for in personality and interests they are poles apart. Equally, the struggle of the natural inclination to overcome the spiritual mind of the believer is a recurring battle with which all believers will be familiar. A state of war exists between the old, the natural, and the new, the spiritual (Rom. 7: 23).

We are reminded that Isaac's line was that of Abraham (the father of the faithful) and that Isaac, as the son of the free-woman was the son of promise, not the son after the flesh (Gal. 4: 22-23). Isaac, therefore, took Rebekah as his wife, not a woman from among the Canaanites but from Paddan-Aram, Abraham's own land of origin. His desire is to prolong the line of the children of promise in obedience to God. When Rebekah does not conceive she does not err as Sarai did, by persuading Isaac to take a servant, a bondwoman, to bear a child. Isaac's response to this problem is to intreat the Lord, and the Lord's answer to his prayer is immediate. But the Lord's answer, while satisfying Isaac's plea, is effective in a most unexpected manner.

The struggle of the two unborn children in Rebekah's womb emphasizes the elemental division of the conflict: not a mere clash of personalities, or difference of opinion between brothers. It is a conflict of two absolutely opposing spheres of influence in our world. And yet, the Lord draws out the main point, "the elder shall serve the younger". Two nations or two peoples are clearly represented in the struggle. It is not an endless struggle, however, nor a battle of two equal forces, for one of the two is a Jacob, a "supplanter". This aspect particularly is emphasized in the naming of the child, and has its most valid bearing upon our experience as believers, as follows.

The man with the natural appetites is the first-born Esau, father of the Edomites, and belongs to the realm to which all

mankind belongs to on entry into the world; Satan's kingdom. As those stained by inherent sin, our "first-born" nature is of the world; i. e. lacking self-control, worldly in senses and outlook. But the younger who supplants the elder is akin to that new beginning in the life of the believer, when upon faith in the Lord Jesus Christ he is born anew of the Spirit. In this life the believer can never be fully free of the natural inclinations of the "old man", but as with Jacob it is the lineage of faith, the younger, which supplants the elder.

The qualities of the younger may also be seen to mirror the spiritual characteristics of the believer. Note particularly Jacob's "ordinariness" in worldly terms - "a plain man" as opposed to Esau's cunning. The latter's craftiness demonstrates his attachment to the world. He was "a man of the field", a man who was expert in earthly matters, but whose care for anything beyond his senses and natural appetite was non-existent. The former's simple life as a tent-dweller paralleled his grandfather's pilgrim way, having no fixed place in this world, but looking for the lasting life to come. So is the believer's vision transformed on salvation, from being fixed upon an earthly home to sojourning in this life whilst awaiting the Lord's return.

Jacob's trickery entirely exploited Esau's earth-bound "living-for-the-moment" character [Comment 1]. Jacob saw his chance with Esau's ravenous hunger and grasped it eagerly knowing the spiritual value of the birthright far more than the temporal material inheritance. We should not be too sensitive to Jacob's means, despite the apparent wrong involved for Esau's nature was such that he could not have done God's will. We see God's will in his prophecy to Rebekah fulfilled (Rom. 9: 12-13).

So is God's will accomplished in those who are brought out of darkness into the light of Christ's love, to a spiritual inheritance. Not that Jacob had any inherent special qualities: so the believer has no personal merits in himself, yet the mystery is that we too are foreknown by God and chosen in Christ (Eph. 1: 4).

R. M. Dickson

From Nottingham: Although our subject is Jacob and his life, in passing we make a brief reference to Isaac. Much less is recorded in Scripture about Jacob's father than is the case with Abraham. We are told more about Isaac's earlier life than his later experiences. God was gracious and kind to Isaac (Gen. 26: 2-6) notably "because that Abraham obeyed...." Isaac was reaping some blessing through the nature and character of the life of his father before him. How

we should value faithful men and women who were before us!

Jacob's birth. Isaac was 40 years old when he took Rebekah to be his wife. They had been married for 20 years when Esau and Jacob were born. Abraham was contemporary with Jacob for 15 years and it is possible that the aged pilgrim may have passed on to his grandson some of the promises of God made to him and related some of his experiences. Isaac lived to be 180 years of age. Comparing the length of men's lives in those days with now it seems reasonable to think that Isaac was in the full vigour of manhood when the two children were born. Even so, during the years that passed after their marriage, there appears to have been disquiet because Rebekah was barren and Isaac intreated the Lord for his wife (v. 21). This seems to show that in these earlier days he was more spiritually alert than in later times.

The Lord heard and Rebekah conceived. In this there is a similarity between Abraham and Sarah, although there are significant differences. Events which happened years afterwards lead us to think that what was revealed to Rebekah (v. 23) was noted carefully by her and treasured in her heart which reminds us of what is said about Mary (Luke 2: 19).

God's Foreknowledge and Sovereign Choice. Following the enquiry of the Lord it was revealed to Rebekah that she was to have twins and that the two children would be progenitors of two nations, one of which would be stronger than the other and the elder would serve the younger which, of course, was the reverse of the normal order.

This was and will be true in the literal sense but it is a picture of the two natures in the believer. The elder, the sinful nature should be subject to the younger nature, i. e. that which comes as a result of the new birth. All too often our experience is that the opposite is true, the old nature being allowed to have the upper hand. Another aspect of this is seen in Gen 27: 40. There is an old, an Esau-type, nature in us which seeks to "break loose" and to shake off the new nature (*cf.* Gal 2: 20; 1 Cor. 15: 46).

In the revelation to Rebekah we see God's foreknowledge of all things and His sovereign choice. We cannot question the choice of God. We may well ask, each one, why did God choose to reveal His Son in me? Why did God call me?

Divine Election. This truth is demonstrated also in the passage before us. The principle of divine election is presented in Rom. 9: 10-13 and Eph. 1: 3-6. We, as believers, were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, foreordained unto adoption as sons, and

foreordained according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His will. See also 1 Pet. 1: 1-2; Rom. 8: 28-30. God knows the end from the beginning. He knows who will accept the message of life. We do not. Therefore we have a responsibility to preach the gospel and men have the responsibility to accept or reject it. God alone knows who will hear, accept it and live.

Profanity. Jacob was a "plain"¹ man, or as the margin shows, "quiet", or "harmless". He was dwelling in tents which emphasizes his pilgrim character and reminds us of Heb. 11: 13-16, but it was observed that this was not "The" tent about which we read in Judg. 5: 24. Esau was a man of the field and this speaks to us of a man of the world. He despised his birthright (Gen. 25: 34), and thus lost the blessing associated with it. While it was the divine purpose that Jacob should receive the birthright it does not alter the fact that Esau was profane, i. e. "acting or speaking in contempt of sacred things". He was mistaken in thinking his hunger was so great he was "going to die" (Gen. 25: 32 AVM) if it was not satisfied immediately, and he counted the needs of his body of more importance than the birthright. The lesson is for us to value our birthright which brings us everlasting life, peace with God, a place in God's house if we obey His word, and an eternity of bliss with our Saviour.

R. Hickling

From Vancouver: The word, pilgrim, according to Vine, is "someone sojourning in a strange place, away from one's own people. The words of Heb. 11: 13 express this "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth".

The characteristics of Jacob and Esau were altogether different and it would appear that Isaac and Rebekah's outlooks were quite different. How important it is that Christian fathers and mothers should seek to work together in happy fellowship to bring up their children spiritually that they may serve the Lord. It was tragic that Isaac sought his fellowship with Esau only and this resulted in Rebekah seeking fellowship with Jacob [Comment 5]. Before Esau and Jacob were born Rebekah had trials and went to the Lord. The Lord's answer was very positive and revealed what lay in the future. Twins were to be born and each would become a nation. One would be stronger than the other and the elder would serve the younger. Technically, Esau was the elder, yet God could foresee that his brother would be more spiritual than he [Comment 6]#

It is significant that the Lord should reveal the future to Rebekah rather than to Isaac, and perhaps tells us something about her spiritually; Verse 27 reveals the characteristics of the two boys. Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man dwelling in tents. It seems that Isaac loved Esau because he enjoyed his venison. Esau's thoughts were not devoted to spiritual things. How true the scripture, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not depart from it"^{ft}(Prov. 22: 6).

One day when Esau was hunting he came home exhausted. He saw his brother making boiled pottage. Esau said to Jacob ^M"Feed me, I pray thee", ^M"I am faint". Jacob realised this was his opportunity as Esau despised his birthright when he asked "what profit shall the birthright do to me?". The birthright, in the days of the children of Israel, for the firstborn was a double portion of the inheritance. How much do we value the great inheritance that we enjoy in Christ?

J. Bell

COMMENTS

1. (Several Papers): Jacob was not at fault in the matter of the birthright (see Editorial). It was a business arrangement made by two very experienced men, each of whom reckoned they got the better of the bargain. The fact that Esau was in reality the loser was entirely his own fault. His later remorse was in keeping with the natural instinct of man (as we should say) to "have his cake and eat it". On the other hand there is not the slightest evidence that on this occasion Jacob was covetous (in the bad sense), devious, employing natural reasoning and deceit as suggested by friends in Birkenhead, Birmingham and Liverpool.

Nor was he scheming, calculating, impatient, employing trickery or exploiting Esau as friends in Manchester and Methil say.

2. (Cowdenbeath): Just as Jacob's actions at birth foretold his future so we might expect the same of Esau's description. He was red, the Hebrew word for which carries us back to the first man, Adam. Esau was by nature like that first man, Adam, rather than the second man, Christ. The comparison with David is helpful for David's heart was right with God whereas Esau's was not. David was, therefore, able to use his considerable natural endowments whereas Esau was unable to make acceptable use of his natural talents. Friends in Birmingham give an indication of the significance of the roughness of Esau which, again, we cannot fail to associate with the natural man.

3. (Derby): {There is nothing necessarily wrong in being a supplanter. David supplanted Saul as Israel's king. The new man in the believer is to supplant the old man as friends in Methil point out. Some of us may supplant others at the Judgement Seat of Christ for the scriptures say, "hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown".

4. (Liverpool): Presumably friends in Liverpool have in mind the fact that the people of God would be descended from Jacob. Prior to the anointing of Aaron only Melchizedek was a priest of God.

5. (Vancouver): The scripture does not say that Rebekah turned to Jacob in lieu of Isaac.

6. (Vancouver): This is true, but it is not, of course, the reason why God chose Jacob. I E P

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. From Birkenhead: Was Isaac aware of God's revelation to Rebekah?

The scriptures do not say. Since Esau understood the significance of Jacob's name (Gen 27: 36) it is hard to believe that Isaac, with his superior spiritual discernment did not know too.

2. From Liverpool: Is it too fanciful to spiritualize the occupations of Jacob and Esau to mean that Jacob was a man content to stay at home, while Esau had the restless energy of the natural man? Furthermore is it also fanciful to see Isaac's love of venison as a sign of his "fleshly desire" which led him away from the will of God in the matter (vv 27-8) ?

The contrasting of the occupations of the twins, mentioned in the first question, does not arise from "spiritualizing" the passage. Rather it is the first or superficial meaning as might be perceived by the natural man. Further investigation, however, shows the words to be carefully chosen to indicate deeper, spiritual significance. See for instance the distinction made by friends in Nottingham between "dwelling in tents" and "dwelling in the tent". Many other such points are made by contributors. The method by which spiritual significance is attached to natural things was exactly that employed by the Lord Jesus. Just as He expected the men of His day to discern the spiritual meaning of His spoken word, so He expects us to do likewise with the written word. The answer to the second question is therefore, yes. Isaac showed a love for the flesh and his son Esau's full-blown lust of the flesh contributed to his selling his birthright.

I. E. P.

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

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Isaac was anxious to avoid the situation where he might die without having blessed his elder son. His word to Esau precipitated a counsel of despair on the part of Rebekah. Jacob feared the failure of her plan. But they all regarded the blessing as being of tremendous importance.

Although Rebekah sought to secure her aim by a scheme which seems to have been motivated by her love for Jacob, the outcome of the scheme itself was fraught with sorrow for her. She urged Jacob to flee from home for a few days, but these proved to be all her remaining days. The Lord's intimation to her when she "went to inquire" of Him (Gen. 25. 22), if recollected amid her impatience and panic, should have assured her that the course of events would in any case follow the will of the Lord.

Jacob's hope was based upon his purchase of the birthright which Esau had despised. Yet his compliance with his mother's scheme began long years of hardship and struggle until ultimately he was brought to acknowledge the futility of human strength and ingenuity, and only then did he find blessing in conformity to the **rule** of God in his life. Nevertheless the bitter fruits of his actions were still to be tasted in the cruel deception which his sons would practise upon him in turn in his loss of Joseph for so many years.

Isaac indeed had to realise how unswerving God's purpose was in its fulfilment, in spite of merely human loyalties; yet by faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau even concerning things to come. However, his former insensitivity to the counsel of God caused him great distress.

It is not God who adds the sorrows, for His blessing maketh rich; but we are so easily beset by sin and many a burden. Let

us prize the blessing, and run the race with patience, looking unto the Lord Jesus, who is our example.

E. A.

**THE PILGRIMAGE OF JACOB AND THAT OF THE BELIEVER -
THE NEED TO RUN WITH PATIENCE (GEN. 27: 1-45)**

From Birkenhead: Our study of last month's portion made it clear that when considering the human relationship of Esau and Jacob we should view the spiritual relationship with God, and see the clear and expressed selection of Jacob in the place of his brother Esau. In revealing this choice to Rebekah the Lord clearly told her that the younger brother would supplant the elder in his lifetime, and also that the descendants of Jacob would have supremacy over those of Esau. However, it is evident that Rebekah, favouring Jacob as she did, was anxious to speed up the course of events which the Lord had decreed. We are given no specific reason for her action and can only attribute it to impatience on her part. The fact that Jacob so readily fell in with the arrangement shows the weakness of the selfish sinner.

Again it was the absence of Esau which allowed Jacob the opportunity to perpetrate this premeditated act. The result of his deception was that Jacob obtained from Isaac that blessing which Esau would, under normal circumstances, have expected to gain. It is, however, quite clear that the purpose of the Lord was fulfilled in the outworking of this act, but this nevertheless involved both Rebekah and Jacob in sin.

The Christian today lives in a world where on all sides he is encouraged to take things "now" rather than to wait. Whilst he may feel this is a modern phenomenon, it is clear that impatience is a vice which goes back to Jacob and beyond. The very birth of Jacob and Esau showed that the Lord was working to His own timetable and this is a most valuable lesson for the Christian to learn. It is, indeed, one learned already by Satan who so often profitably uses the natural impatience to thwart the Lord's will. We must see from the passage that to be possessed of patience is to be led by the Lord as opposed to a natural tendency towards forcing matters.

A Christian, whose birthright is that he has become a child of

God, will learn that impatience may bring its own results within his lifetime as Rebekah found when her failure resulted in her separation from her favourite son for the remainder of her life.

In order that we "run the race" of the Christian it will be necessary for us to be possessed of patience and "walk" with the Lord.

Among the scriptures which we found helpful in our study were the following: Ps. 37: 7; Phil. 1: 6; Jas. 1: 4.

R. C. Haplin, R. C M. Bolt

From Brantford: What a heart-rending scene is depicted for us in Genesis 27, as we picture Esau before his father Isaac saying "Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father". And he lifted up his voice, and wept. Yes, there was only one blessing and Jacob received it, and as Isaac said to Esau "he shall be blessed".

Esau, we are sure, would know the birthright and blessing went together, but years before in a moment of weakness, as he came in famished, the birthright seemed of little importance to him. "I am at the point to die: and what profit shall the birthright do to me"? So Jacob seized his opportunity and Esau sold his birthright in exchange for food to sustain his natural body. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus put the right value on our life when he said, "For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his life"?

But was the birthright and blessing ever Esau's? At the birth of Esau and Jacob God revealed to Rebekah that "the elder shall serve the younger". Rom. 8: 25 says, "But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it". Isaac and Rebekah did not seem to have the faith Abraham had in God as he waited for God's promise of a son. Rom. 4: 20-21 says of him, "Yea, looking unto the promises of God, he wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform". It would appear that Rebekah felt God's purposes were not being fulfilled and she had to take action herself. She ran ahead of God's time and in the process deceit and untruths are recorded.

In Rom. 9: 10-13 we see things from God's point of view. Before the **children had** done anything good or **bad**, God **said the elder shall serve** the younger, **and as** quoted from **Malachi**, "Jacob I loved, **but Esau I hated**". Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid (Rom. 9: 14). **Elihu could say** to Job "For God is greater than man. Why dost thou strive against **him**? For he giveth not account of **any of his** matters" (Job 33: 12-13). We **stand in** awe of God's absolute knowledge **and feel** so **humble** before **him**, **saying as Job did** at the **end of his** trial "**I know that thou canst do all things. and that no purpose of thine can be restrained**" (Job 42: 2).

E. J. B.

From Cowdenbeath: Without the illuminating words found in Rom. 9: 15, 16, Heb. 11: 20 and Heb. 12: 16, 17 we could not **reach a** correct understanding of this **extremely tense family** episode **because** the **Genesis** account provides only the **human** aspects of it. **Human** action and **human** accountability must **be seen** alongside **divine** election and **divine** overruling. It is impossible to **blend the** two together.

Isaac's timing would **appear to be very premature because he had still 50 years to live**, but in God's purposes this was the right time to **give the blessing** to Jacob **and for events to happen to cause him to leave** home. **If Isaac** knew of God's choice of Jacob then **his intention to bless Esau** was in direct **defiance** of the will of God. **Perhaps it is more likely and more in keeping** with the character of **the man** to think of **him as acting in ignorance** [Comment 1]. It was God's **will** that the words of **blessing** should **be** spoken over the **head** of Jacob and, although **the** account of what **happened** would **seem to make it appear** that **he** obtained it **by his** deceit **and lies**, Rom. 15: 16 **makes it very clear** that it was **given to him** because God **had mercy** upon him. It is God's prerogative to **have mercy on** whom **He** will. Like ourselves Jacob **learned** that God's **mercy is great** (1 Pet. 1: 3), **and that He is rich in mercy** (Eph. 2: 4). **He received** the blessing not **because of**, but **in spite of**, what **he** did. **We are** not told how Jacob felt **when he left his father's presence**; **but when** some twenty years later **he** confessed to God, "**I am not worthy**" (Gen. 32: 10) **he was, perhaps**, reflecting on **the day he received the blessing**.

Isaac spoke by **faith** "concerning **things** to come" (Heb. 11: 20). **He** was, therefore, speaking **in prophecy and as** "no prophecy ever

came by the will of man" we must view him as ^Mbeing moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1: 21). What he spoke were not his own words and, therefore, could not be recalled. Realising this he said, ^MYea, and he shall be blessed".

Although Esau said so, Jacob did not take away his birthright (v.36). He sold it to him and on the day he did so showed no evidence of being regretful. It was not until he was told that the blessing had gone to his brother and that his father would not change his mind (i. e. repent) even in the face of his bitter crying and tears that he realised that the birthright and the blessing go together. The folly of his action in earlier life came home to him. His loss was irretrievable. The words in Heb. 12 are given as a warning to us lest we should exchange spiritual things of worth which came to us through the new birth for material things which, though they may satisfy fleshly desires at the time, will later produce a state of remorse without hope of recovering what we have given away.

It was surely no accident that Rebekah heard when Isaac spoke to Esau because, humanly speaking, had she not, then Isaac would have blessed the wrong man. What an opportunity for her to have acted as in earlier life and to have enquired of the Lord (Gen. 25: 22) and to have waited with patience for him to work, for "God...worketh for him that waiteth for him" (Isa. 64: 4). She made the wrong use of her information. Like ourselves, sometimes, she felt confident that she was able to handle the situation which seemed to call for swift action.

J. Bowman

From Derby: Esau was 40 years old when he married the Hittite women who were a grief of mind to his parents. The children of this union could never inherit the promise (Heb. 12: 16). Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah who was chosen for him by the Lord. Divine election chose Isaac before Ishmael and divine election chose Jacob before Esau, but Isaac resisted this and tried to alter it [Comment 2]. We see a divided family with no one coming out of this episode with honour. They all showed a lack of patience. Isaac thought he was dying when he gave the blessing, but he was to live for many more years. Rebekah must have thought that she was preventing Isaac from making a big mistake. She did not realise that God could fulfil his promise without her help.

She carried Jacob along with **her** stressing that the **blessing** was "before the Lord". This fact was of little importance to **Esau**. **He was a sportsman living** for the present **and mainly** wanting the temporal benefits, **but** it was of paramount importance to Jacob who looked to the **future and was** content to **live in tents like his** father and grandfather before **him**. **As the flesh would perhaps be** flavoured with almonds, nuts **and raisins**, little **difference** would be **discernible** between the **kid's** meat **and** the venison. **Rebekah** felt so strongly about the **blessing** that **her** mother-love **was prepared to bear a curse** if one was to **be** given. **In the event Isaac** just confirmed the **blessing** **realising** that **he had been** going against the Lord's **will**. **Isaac** closely questioned Jacob's identity after **he had declared** "the Lord **thy** God **sent me** good speed". This **remark** was so out of **keeping with Esau's** character [Comment 4], When **Isaac** was **satisfied** that **Esau was in** front of **him he gave** the blessing. **He** bestowed temporal **blessings and then he gave** the birthright. **He** does not go as far as "**in thee shall all the families** of the earth **be blessed**" (Gen. 12: 3).

When **Esau came in "Isaac trembled very exceedingly"**. At **last he realised he had been** resisting God **and trying to give the blessing** to one who was not worthy **because of his** profane nature and **his** heathen marriages. **He did not blame Rebekah** or Jacob for **their deceit as he realised** it **sprang** from **his** own determination to **have his** own way. **Esau** was wrong to expect **the blessing when he had** sold the birthright **as** the two go together. However, after **much** persuasion **and** tears **he** was given a **blessing**, though it could only **be** greatly inferior to Jacob's.

As a result Jacob was **seen to be** the successor to **Abraham and in God's line and he** was sent to find a **wife** from the **family** of Nahor. **He** never **saw his** mother again. After this poor start it took Jacob many **years** to learn the lesson of patience. **He** got the blessing **by the** **mercy** of God. We also get the blessing **by the** **mercy** of God. **We can** inherit the promises through faith **and** patience so let **us** not **be sluggish** (Heb. 6: 12).

G. W. Conway

From Galston: Rebekah had been told by God, "The **elder shall serve** the younger" (Gen. 25: 23). **She** also **knew** that **Isaac** loved **Esau** more than Jacob **because** of the venison. **Rebekah** might well

have been praying about this matter for many years. However, when Rebekah heard Isaac tell Esau to go into the field and get venison that he might bless him (Esau) she evidently felt that now she must act and act immediately if Jacob were not to lose the blessing, which now belonged to him by right of purchase of the birthright. We cannot condone her action but we sympathise with Rebekah in her concern for Jacob's spiritual welfare.

Strictly speaking all four protagonists were in the wrong - Isaac because he must have known that Esau had sold his birthright - Esau because he knew - Rebekah because she urged Jacob on to deceive Isaac - and Jacob because he did deceive Isaac. However, in mitigation of Jacob's deed, we make the following points:

- 1) Jacob tried to say "No" to Rebekah at first (vv. 11 & 12)
- 2) Jacob valued the blessing far more than Esau (Heb. 12: 16)
- 3) Having bought the birthright from Esau was Jacob not entitled to say, "I am Esau" in all matters relating to the birthright? Heb. 12: 16, 17 confirm that the birthright and the blessing go together, so from the time that Esau sold his birthright he had forfeited the blessing as far as God was concerned. We compared this to the sinner who deliberately rejects the Gospel in his heart. "He that believeth not hath been judged already" (John 3: 18).

Other points for consideration are:

- a) God had a special purpose for Jacob which was not to be frustrated by either Isaac's or Esau's puny will (Rom. 9: 10-16).
- b) Isaac trembled because he knew that he had gone against the mind of God in his intention to bless Esau rather than Jacob.
- c) "Yea, and he shall be blessed". Isaac knew that there was no possibility of revoking the blessing bestowed for he knew God had blessed and that he (Isaac) was only the channel of blessing.
- d) It is a fact that goat's meat has a taste not unlike venison and like venison is very lean.

J. Joint son, D. Ramage

From Liverpool: *Running.* Life can be thought of as a race. There is a difference of tactics for a hundred-yard sprint and a marathon - the race of life should be paced out like a marathon [Comment 5]. This will involve remaining calm in face of trials, being able to pick up again after sufferings or hardships and patience in waiting for guidance. This passage is an example of Jacob's failure to pace his life in this way.

Panic. The outcome of the scheming of Rebekah and Jacob was what God intended. Perhaps Rebekah's faith was severely tested when she realised that Isaac was intent on giving the blessing to Esau - this prompted a panic reaction in which she felt she had to work quickly to ensure Jacob got the blessing. Of course God would not have allowed Esau to get the blessing which he had already promised to Jacob - a fact overlooked in the panic - and calmness on the part of Rebekah and Jacob would have allowed God to work in His own way. It is easy to accept the promises of God in the calm of our Christian lives but it is when a crisis develops that this faith is fully tested.

Patience. It is easy to criticize Rebekah, but what ought she to have done? It is evident from Gen. 25:22 that she had faith and confided in God. She should have taken this problem too to God with the same confidence that He would again be faithful to her. This principle is reiterated in Prov. 3: 5, 6, ^M"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart" rather than leaning on our "own understanding".

Consequences. Jacob, although seen as an example of one who failed to "run the race with patience", was a man of faith and in his life he showed spiritual insight and prevailed with God. Nevertheless it is true that a man reaps what he sows, and Jacob experienced similar deception at the hands of others. While the teaching of Rom. 9: 10-16 remains clear, nevertheless Jacob was held responsible for his actions and it is through God's mercy that he was restored [Comment 6].

K. T. Jones, D. J. Webster

From Manchester: All agreed that Isaac had been a great man of faith. It was suggested that an early example of this faith was displayed when, as a lad, he faithfully followed his father Abraham up to Moriah. Some difference of opinion, however, came to light

when it was suggested that Isaac had displayed a lack of faith in God by being too hasty in making his will.

Are we to assume that Isaac had prior knowledge of the word of the Lord to Rebekah in Gen. 25: 23? - "Two nations are in your womb... and the older will serve the younger". If Isaac had this knowledge, is it fair to presume that he was somehow aware that he ought not to give his older son, Esau, "the blessing", as was the normal legal family practice of the day? [Comment 3].

After Isaac had blessed Jacob there was no possibility whatsoever that the blessing could be withdrawn, for it did not depend upon man's desire or effort but on God's mercy (Rom. 9: 11, 16) [Comment 7].

The story of Jacob and Esau is a sad one because it is the study of a split family, of parental favour of one child, even to the extent of blatantly encouraging one to deceive and steal from the other [Comment 8]. It was agreed that Rebekah emerges from the story with the "blackest" name. Despite knowing the word of the Lord concerning Jacob she actively caused him to deceive and cheat. Her trust in God must have been poor if she judged him unable to fulfil his purposes without her methods of deceit to help him! Yet despite what happened the end does not justify the means; God's purposes could not be obstructed. Rebekah was condemned by her own words (Gen. 27: 13). Perhaps her self-inflicted punishment was that she was never to see Jacob again.

Heb. 12: 16, 17 aroused some interesting and valuable discussion. The RV describes Esau as a "profane person... who for one mess of meat sold his birthright", and although "he afterward desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected (for he found no place of repentance), though he sought it diligently with tears". This raised the issue of whether or not it is possible that there are things which may be done for which God may not grant repentance. With regard to the verses in Heb. 12: 16, 17 about Esau, it is not certain as to their exact meaning. There is no record in the Old Testament of any repentance on the part of Esau, apart from Gen. 27: 34 which says "he cried with an exceeding great and bitter cry" when he realised that the blessing which he had bartered for a mess of pottage was finally lost (the birthright and the blessing are inseparately bound up with one another - thus when Esau sold his birthright for a trivial

material gain he showed that the blessing had no value in his sight).

The NIV suggests that it was not repentance Esau was seeking but the blessing by means of changing Isaac's mind - "he could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears" [Comment 9]. The Greek has ambiguously "he sought *it* with tears", and the "it" could equally refer to either the "blessing" or "repentance". It is not to be doubted, however, that Esau must have felt bitter remorse at his former folly in despising his birthright and **selling** it so rashly for such a petty price, for something which may have seemed important at the time. He could not now undo the consequences of what he had done.

J. Clarke, M.S. Elliot

From Nottingham: It was found that the study title summed up the most important lesson that we could learn from this passage of Scripture.

The scene opens on an unhappy situation typified by Rebekah's covert action in v. 5. Although she was fully aware of God's purposes concerning her sons she deliberately tried to hurry up those purposes by her own strength and was not prepared to bide her time.

Isaac too appears to have been at a low spiritual ebb by putting the "blessing" on the same plane as eating his stew. We wondered whether or not Isaac was aware of God's words to Rebekah in ch. 25: 23 [See Comment 1].

It may be that in the day-to-day toil of her life Rebekah could not see beyond the situation where Esau was taking the leading role. It is as well for us to be reminded too that although we may pass through problems that are difficult to understand, God still works **His** purposes out. In this context it was also observed that it is possible to get the right things in the wrong way, or in other words, the end does not justify the means.

We considered at some length the difference between the birthright and the blessing with Esau's attitude especially in mind. It was suggested that while the birthright was literally a right, the blessing was something that came as a result of that; the blessing

could be measured by possessions, the birthright was deeper than that and covered spiritual matters that Esau could not grasp. Amazingly we find that Esau walked away happy at losing his birthright!

Much has previously been said of how Jacob's use of deception appears to be in conflict with the prominent position that he occupies in God's dealings with Israel and of course in the Messianic line. Gal. 6: 7 appears to be a helpful verse in this case both for understanding Jacob's life and for putting into perspective our own actions. As well as leaving his borne penniless, Jacob suffered much misery and hardship in later life by being deceived himself, first by Laban and later by his own sons in the case of Joseph.

In spite of Isaac's own state of spiritual declension he was not so far away from God that he was not afraid when he thought he might have been plotting against the divine purpose. We thought that this was the meaning of v. 33 where ^MIsaac trembled violently", (NIV).

C. Edis

COMMENTS

1. (Cowdenbeath): We are not told that Isaac knew of the Lord's words to Rebekah in Gen. 25: 23 that the elder would serve the younger. Isaac's character is elsewhere delineated as obedient under the chastening of God and peaceable under provocation, but not as of one deliberately opposing the will of the Lord. In this instance he rather seems misguidedly to follow the dictates of custom and of his own inclination.

2. (Derby): It is difficult to be certain that Isaac was not simply out of touch with God's purpose in the matter, and unwittingly attempting what was contrary to the will of God.

3. (Manchester): If it were the case that Isaac had knowledge of the word of the Lord to Rebekah concerning the elder serving the younger, it is doubtful whether he could feel confident about telling the one whom he thought was Esau, "Be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee", (27: 29).

E. A.

4. (Derby): Friends **in Derby** highlight one of the bright spots **in** the sombre tale that unfolds **in** this chapter. Jacob's **disguise** was a thin one and **he** entered into the deception against **his** better judgement. The **answer he gave** showed the true **man lurking** not far below the **surface** as well as **his inexperience in such matters**. It was **an** answer so uncharacteristic of **Esau** that it immediately aroused **Isaac's** suspicion. **In this** we see that **Isaac's** spiritual perception was not too remote either. As for **Rebekah**, she **embarked** upon a wrong course **but was** not so **blinded by sin** that she **did** not know that she would have to **pay a** penalty. How foreign is **sin and its fruit** to the **new** nature of the **believer!**

I. E. P.

5. (Liverpool): The illustration **made by friends in Liverpool** is **based** on a New Testament **verse** which **may be** exactly **applied** to this portion **in Genesis**, namely Heb. 12: 1. Timing is of great importance in **the race in which** the **believer runs** for **the** course has **been** marked out **by the One** who knows **the end** from the beginning. Just **as** it is important not to **run** too slowly so it is **equally as** important not to **race** ahead. **In** the matter of the birthright Jacob **bided his** time and it **came in** due season. **In** the matter of the blessing, however, **he** moved too **quickly**. **But** the fault **did** not **begin** with Jacob. **Isaac**, too, was **ahead** of **his** time **in** thinking that the **time** of **his** departure was near. Previously **Rebekah had** shown that she **knew** how to wait upon **the** Lord but on **this** occasion she was caught **up** in the **general** panic. Thus it was that Jacob's **failing in** the matter of the **blessing** owed **much** to the **faults** of others. That the matter of **fulfilling the Lord's will in His own time** is difficult to **achieve** not least **because** of the good intentions of others is well shown **in** the **life** of the Lord **Jesus Himself**. See for **example**, John 2: 3-4, 6: 15, 11: 21 and 32, 13: 37-38. The Lord, however, was never deflected from **His** course.

I. E. P.

6. (Liverpool): There is no **specific** condemnation **given in the** Scriptures of Jacob's actions **in securing the blessing** from **his** father but we cannot justify **his lies and his** deceit. The **fact that he** experienced **similar** deception at the hands of others does, however, **seem** to illustrate the **principle** enunciated **in Gal. 6: 7** that, "whatsoever a **man** soweth, that **shall he** also **reap**".

In contrast, he obtained the birthright from Esau in a straight-forward transaction to which Esau agreed. Esau was misrepresenting the facts when he put the two transactions on the same footing in Gen. 27: 36.

J. K. D. J.

Alone among Editors, but in company with many contributors, I find it difficult to agree that the obtaining of the birthright by Esau was "a straight-forward transaction" (see also issue 8301). We would think it sharp practice if we were to obtain something which we knew to be valuable for much less than its true value while the seller was under some duress, especially if he did not recognize its worth. We would feel obliged to put off the transaction until calmer circumstances prevailed, or to make a realistic offer. If we apply these standards to Jacob, we must conclude that he was less than honest over the deal.

P. L. H.

7. (Manchester): Yes, Rom. 9: 16 is another New Testament scripture which is exactly illustrated by events in Genesis. Isaac willed to give Esau the blessing but it is not of him that willeth. Esau ran to get the venison but it is not of him that runneth. Jacob's behaviour in deceiving Isaac did not merit the blessing, but it was his for God showed mercy.

8. (Manchester): Jacob did not steal the blessing. The blessing went with the birthright. As regards human responsibility, apart from considerations of the divine will, Jacob had already bought the birthright. Where he may be faulted is in his deceit by which he attempted to secure by his own wrongful efforts what would have come to him had he run with patience.

I. E. P.

9. (Manchester): This is probably the correct view to take of Heb. 12: 17 and is the one taken in the penultimate paragraph of the Cowdenbeath paper.

J. K. D. J.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. From Cowdenbeath: Whilst accepting that the words of warning regarding Esau (Heb. 12: 17) are directed to the individual, nevertheless, might it not be that in view of the fact that the words "looking carefully" (*episkopeo*, Gk.) is the same word as is translated "exercising the oversight" (1 Pet. 5: 2) (these are the only two occurrences of the word) that verses 15 and 16 are addressed to overseers?

It is true that the words "looking carefully" (Heb. 12: 17) and "exercising the oversight" (1 Pet. 5: 2) are the only two occurrences of the Greek word *episkopeo*. However, the context of Heb. 12 in general does not limit those addressed to overseers, so that it seems more natural perhaps to understand the word in a less specific way as signifying the necessity for all the saints to "look carefully".

2. **From Galston:** a) Verse 42 - who told Rebekah that Esau was going to kill Jacob?

What Esau said in his heart in v. 41 he would have reason to conceal from his father, lest by upsetting him he might attract a curse rather than any blessing. Unless we say that Rebekah was told Esau's words by the Spirit of God, we must assume that Esau had disclosed his secret to a friend and that somehow Rebekah was told.

3. From **Galston:** b) Verses 39-40 - in what way was this a blessing?

If we read the blessing according to the R. V. text (see also the question from Manchester), Isaac was able to desire of God a portion for Esau of the fatness of the earth and of the dew of heaven, because there was a sufficiency of these for both brothers; but he did not also bless him with plenty of corn and wine, because these were the produce of the land. For it was to Jacob that Isaac later said, "and (God Almighty) give thee the blessing of Abraham... that thou mayest inherit the land of thy sojournings" (Gen. 28: 4), whereas Esau's portion of the fatness of the earth and of the dew of heaven was in another land.

"By the sword shalt thou live" perhaps means that in wars Esau would have victory and would not fall by the sword of his enemies; and so it is added that he would, nevertheless, serve his brother and would not prevail over him.

"When thou shalt break loose" implies restlessness (Ps. 55: 2). When Israel transgressed against the law of God, Edom with a sense of grievance at the blessings Israel had received, would break off for a time the yoke of service imposed upon him. Assuredly great loss is incurred by the people of God when the flesh asserts its independence. But the Lord Himself is mighty to save (Isa. 63: 1).

4. From Liverpool: "And he shall be blessed" (v. 33). Is this:

- a) an assertion that because the actual words containing the blessing were spoken to Jacob, even though not intended for him by the speaker, he would, therefore, be blessed, thus giving the words an intrinsic power? or
- b) the words of resignation spoken by a man of faith who realises that despite his folly God has overruled and seen to it that the one to whom the blessing rightfully belonged was the one to whom it was given?

The blessing pronounced by Isaac was irrevocable; not that the words themselves could be isolated as though they were a powerful formula to be used or misused.

Part b) seems nearer the mark. Isaac would realise even while pronouncing it that the blessing indeed rested on him whom he was blessing. When, however, he was confronted with Esau and knew that he had been deceived, he did not turn to curse Jacob which, naturally speaking, he might have done in anger, or to convince Esau that he had not deliberately betrayed him. Instead he affirmed that Jacob would be blessed, trembling all the time when he perceived the consequence for Esau of losing the blessing, and even more because of the fact that he himself would have attempted something contrary to the will of God and that he had been overruled.

E. A.

It is remarkable that the one action of Isaac's that the Spirit of God had caused to be recorded as an action of faith is the blessing of Jacob and Esau, The blessing he gave was therefore an inspired one. The words of Gen. 27:33, "yea, and he shall be blessed" were uttered by Isaac in a burst of faith in the knowledge; that he had spoken oracularly.

J. K. D. J.

5. **From** Manchester: In the light of Heb. 11: 20 can we really describe Gen. 27: 39, 40 as a "blessing" when we consider that "away from the earth's richness... " is the correct translation of the Hebrew text?

With the reading "away from", which is favoured by many recent versions, Esau is given what appears to be at best a very mixed blessing, being basically that of survival in a desert land.

It is noteworthy that the Septuagint version makes no distinction between the phrases in v. 28 and the phrases in v. 39, using the word *apo* in both verses for "of the fatness" and "of the dew".

Five examples of "away from" are collected by Brown in his Hebrew Lexicon. In one of these, namely Jud. 5: 11 the word *apo* is selected again by the Greek translators. In Num. 15: 24, Job 28: 4 the Greek word is *ek*. The LXX omits the phrase in Isa. 14: 19. The scholars are divided on Gen. 4: 11, Delitzsch and Dillmann supporting "away from" and Knobel and Keil translating the word as "from". This leaves Prov. 20: 3 which Brown translates "to sit away from strife" (from the root *yashabh*), but Davidson defines as "cessation from strife" (from the root *shabath*). The LXX here uses a different reading "to turn aside from".

In conclusion we have to weigh the rare parallel example in Jud. 5: 11 against the common usage of *apo* (Gk) and *min* (Heb.) to mean "some of", (see Turner p. 208, 237).

E. A.

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Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8303

In our previous **studies** we have **been** able to discern clear parallels between Jacob's **experience and** our own experience. This study-portion provides us **with** another parallel.

It was to Jacob **that the** first disclosure of **truth** relative to **the** house of God was given. Jacob, apparently, **did** not realize **the significance** of **the** location outside Luz **that he** selected for his resting place on **that** memorable night on his journey towards Haran. **The inspired** record, however, describes it as *the place* (Heb. RVM). The vision given to Jacob **that night made him** realize that **the** place in which **he had** spent **the night** was **unique; it was** the place of **divine** choice **and** hallowed **by the** divine **presence** in a very special way. **That** knowledge, therefore, **was imparted to him by a** divinely-given revelation. Several of our contributors **have emphasized this** most important point, stressing **that in** our **experience**, too, the **truth** of **the** house of God has **been** revealed to us from **the** Word of God **by the Spirit** of God.

At this **time** Jacob **was a** mature man, more than **seventy years** of **age, and** one who **had** strong and **sincere** longings after God **and** spiritual **things; but** this portion in Genesis **28** contains **the** first recorded **appearance** of God to Jacob, **and it** took place **at** Bethel. **This** underlines for us another **facet** of **truth that can be traced** throughout **the** Scriptures, for God reveals Himself **in a** special way to **men** who **are in His** house **and in** alignment **with His** purpose. Leviticus **1: 1** depicts God speaking to Moses from His dwelling place. **Of Samuel it was** recorded, "the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel **in** Shiloh **by the** word of **the** Lord" (1 Sam. 3: 21). **David** also **knew that** God **is** seen **and** known in a very special way in **His** house and so **he**

wanted to dwell there all the days of his life (Ps. 27: 4). The individual who longs to know more of God and His ways will find a satisfaction of those longings in the house of God that cannot be found elsewhere.

J. K. D. J.

The short series of articles which begins below attempts to paint the historical background to the lives of the Patriarchs, to help in understanding the kind of world in which they lived, and to show the way in which God's overruling power amongst the nations was used to further His purposes for His people. Such secular information cannot, of course, have the authority of Scripture. Our understanding of it often has to be revised in the light of further discovery. However, the articles are based on the general present day understanding and will be found both interesting and useful.

Editors

THE TIMES OF THE PATRIARCHS

It was Nebuchadnezzar who said ^M... the Most High... doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand... " (Dan. 4: 34, 35). We sing often the words of Gerhardt's hymn "God everywhere hath sway, And all things serve His might...". History, through the centuries, shows clearly and remarkably the overruling hand of God in so ordering the course of man's movements and experiences to bring about the divine purposes. This is true, of course, of the times of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when God had already raised or was in the process of raising other nations and peoples to bring into effect His will and prepare the way for the fulfilment of His Word in respect of Israel and the promised blessing through the seed of Abraham (Gen. 22: 18).

The purpose of these articles is to take a brief, sketchy, look at the history of the time with particular reference to the juxtaposition of other nations with the Patriarchs and the land to which God called Abraham and which was promised to his seed.

It is not possible to give precise dates for the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and this study is based on the usually accepted view that the period from the call of Abraham to the death of Jacob was c. 1900-1700 B. C.

EGYPT

To the south of the Land of Promise lay the great power of Egypt. By Jacob's time the civilisation of this land was well established and had experienced many vicissitudes. Egyptologists refer to the main part of the period concerned as the Middle Kingdom covering the

11th and 12th Dynasties although Jacob's life of over 130 years extended into the second Intermediate Period starting c. 1786 B. C. The 11th dynasty, the first dynasty of the Middle Kingdom had ended in confusion but the founder of the 12th dynasty, although elected to an unstable throne, had soon restored order and proved himself a strong ruler.

He moved the centre of his administration from Thebes in the south to the better strategically placed Ithet - Tawy in the area of Memphis, just south of present day Cairo. He strengthened his country by securing the frontiers and restored it economically by improving its agricultural policies and practices and by rebuilding the administration.

His reforms were continued by his successors. The powers and possessions of local princes were reduced and replaced by control by officials from a central authority. Art, architecture and literature flourished. The nobles of the period were eager to be known as men who loved justice, kindness, beauty and splendour. Papyrus rolls dating from this time have been discovered listing a variety of "remedies"¹¹ for numerous ailments, simple arithmetical rules based on the decimal system as used today and elementary astronomical observations. All these, and other studies, were to be developed further and used in a time then still future in the training of Moses.

Yet these people, with all their culture and learning, knew not the Living God. There were many gods in the land but the two worshipped above all others were the sun god called Re and one called Osiris. The sun shone gloriously in the sky above Egypt and splendid temples were erected for its worship. The Nile, with its life-giving waters, brought fertility to the soil and helped to produce the essential crops. Together the river and the fertile land were thought of as one god, Osiris. The Egyptians certainly had clear evidence of the work of the Creator, but unlike Abraham, they failed to recognise the God of glory and were content to continue in and elaborate their system of idol worship.

There is little doubt that such was the land and kingdom of Egypt during the time of Abraham, Isaac and part of the life of Jacob. Such would be the environment met by Abraham during his experience as related in Gen. 12: 10-20. Egypt would not be altogether unknown to him as there was considerable trading between that nation and others. A well-known wall painting on a tomb of c. 2100 B. C. shows goods being brought into Egypt and handed over to an official in return for Egyptian corn.. This commercial practice must have been known to the Patriarchs, and to go to Egypt, especially in a time of famine, for essential

supplies would be an obvious course for a dweller in Canaan and the surrounding areas.

(To be continued)

R. Hickling

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE HOUSE OF GOD (Gen. 28: 10-22)

From Birkenhead: Jacob is again shown to be the one whom the Lord had chosen. We have previously seen him given priority over his brother in the matter of the birthright. Now God gives him a special revelation concerning man's communication with God - communications which were first enjoyed by Adam and Eve.

It is important to notice that although we are dealing with the house of God, which is clearly a place of service for God's chosen people, the Lord in fact chooses individuals. He determines the person, the time, the place, the conditions, and all matters are conducted according to His foreknowledge.

When we look at the narrative concerning the choosing of Jacob, it is apparent that he was not aware of the significance of the place upon which he had "lighted". He took his rest there for the night and when God had completed His revelation to him, Jacob was able, in the light of revealed facts, to determine the significance of the place and its meaning. When he awoke he was able to say that, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not". God had brought him to the realization that as a servant of God he should be in the place where God dwells. In purely physical and material terms, the place was no different in the morning from its condition the previous night. It was, however, clear to Jacob that it was chosen and special, and that he had a new awareness.

Considering the spiritual aspects of the experience, we saw that God must deal with the believer in making the revelation, and that the believer must respond by acknowledging and applying the truth which has been brought to his notice. Both sides of the transaction must be fulfilled and, as with salvation, the ways in which God chooses to reveal the truth are many and varied.

We discussed verse 12 and saw that there was a means of contact with God. This was not one-sided, there would be communication from the Lord as well as prayer to Him.

The principle of giving to the Lord from that which has been received from Him, is very clearly enunciated in the closing words of this passage.

R. C. Halpin, R. D. Williams

From Brantford: The Jacob we see in Genesis 28 seems **far** removed from the man who had received the blessing from his aged father Isaac. He was fleeing from his brother Esau from whom he had by guile and dishonesty taken the birthright and blessing [Comment 7]. What lay before him was an experience that would change the course of his life.

God had chosen Jacob before his birth to be in the divine line of blessing. As he lay alone in a barren place the dream, or vision, he saw of a ladder from earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending spoke of communion with God, for He was there standing above. The Lord's voice which he heard confirmed the blessing before promised to Abraham and Isaac but this time it was announced to him personally. The covenant God (*El Shaddai*), in whom lay his present strength and hope for his future, was saying that the land he lay on would be given to his seed, and in his seed would all the families of the earth be blessed. Then God promised His presence to be with him and to keep him throughout his future life.

This awesome experience caused in Jacob a spirit of worship and praise. As the vision opened to him a realization came that this was God's dwelling place or house and the gate of heaven or means of access into heaven.

Jacob lost no time in acting upon the faith he had in God's promises as he raised the stone on which he had slept in testimony to God's revelation to him and poured oil upon it, sanctifying it. He then made a covenant with God and a vow that he would give again to the Lord from the fulness of the blessing that God had promised to him.

God's promises and blessings reach down to us in this day. When the Lord Jesus came He gave His life in order that all families or nations of the earth might be blessed. It is a wonderful experience to know our sins forgiven through faith in Christ. But God planned a closer relationship in which He could receive worship from His people. "God is faithful, through whom ye were called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord^M (1 Cor. 1: 9). If we

have seen the vision for our day, that as living stones we are built into God's spiritual house, able to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through His Son, Jesus Christ, (1 Pet. 2: 5) then we can show forth His excellencies to others. As a result God will bless us and from the rich blessing He gives we will give again to Him.

D. Burbridge

From Cowdenbeath: No man in Scripture provides us with a truer picture of ourselves than Jacob does. Yet, surprisingly, perhaps, in spite of his many faults and failings this was the man to whom God chose initially to reveal the truth concerning His house. Such a consideration gives us much cause for thankfulness and also for encouragement. Twenty years later in retrospect he confessed, "I am not worthy... of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant" (Gen. 32: 10). Surely we must make the same confession. Although not in the spectacular way in which it was shown to Jacob yet, nevertheless, we too have received it as a revelation from God. It has been shown to us from His Word and we must wonder why it is that our eyes have been opened to see it while so many others fail to do so. It is important that we should appreciate this because even as the ability to identify Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the Living God" comes as a revelation from above so also does the truth concerning God's house.

Jacob learned that there is a place on earth where God dwells and where His presence can be known. This was the realization that came to him when he awoke from his sleep. In his dream not only had he seen the Lord and heard Him speak, but he had seen a ladder (*staircase* – Dr. Strong), which reached right into heaven, go up from the very place where he lay. With our fuller revelation we have learned that from the present-day spiritual house there goes up into heaven a way by which we, as God's people, may ascend into His presence to worship Him. The activity of the angels firstly ascending and then descending illustrates this beautifully. The house is on earth but its sanctuary is in heaven and because the way goes up from the house it is therefore, as Jacob called it, "the gate of heaven".

The building of the house of God is a human responsibility and Jacob's action in setting up the stone as a pillar to be a testimony to mark the place where God dwelt bespeaks this truth. In Old Testament times it was a place of fixed geographical location. The

New Testament spiritual house is not so located, but each of the churches of God which together form the house of God has a fixed location to bear witness as Jacob's pillar did to the truth that God dwells with men.

Why Jacob poured oil upon the pillar and what particular meaning it had for him may be difficult to determine, but in the light of what was done later in connection with the articles of furniture of the tabernacle and with the priests we learn that the purpose was to sanctify them (Lev. 8: 10-12). The oil would speak of the Holy Spirit (see 1 John 2: 20, 27). Not only does the Holy Spirit indwell the individual believer, but He also dwells in each church of God (1 Cor. 3: 16), and the churches of God in the aggregate form an habitation for God in the Spirit. It is a sanctified place because of the presence of God the Spirit. "Holiness becometh Thine house, O Lord" (Ps. 93:5).

As God promised Jacob in his dream all that he asked for when making his vow we would judge that his use of the word "if" would be in the sense of "seeing" or "since" rather than the "if" of condition.

J. Bowman

From Derby: In this passage we have foreshadowings and pre-indications of the future. Jacob had an individual experience which resulted in a personal appreciation of the purpose of God.

The Place is of primary importance. God chooses persons and places. We live ourselves in God's purpose. On the face of it Jacob was running away and was tired and lay down at sunset, but there is the human side and the divine side in connection with spiritual things. Jacob was the object of divine leading. He lighted upon *the* place and although he was unaware of divine guidance it was not by accident or chance that he lifted the stone for his head.

The Voice comes after the place. God spoke first. He speaks to reveal Himself and we have the climax of revelation in the Son of God. He has spoken fully and finally in His Son.

The Vision follows the voice. The realization that came to the conscience of Jacob as to where he was, was clear and serious. It had a very big effect on him and led to his vow. God speaks to produce a response. He gave:

- (1) a divine promise,
- (2) an assurance of His presence,
- (3) a guarantee of protection.

Jacob then realized that:

- (1) the Lord is in this place,
- (2) this is none other but the house of God,
- (3) this is the gate of heaven.

The Vow is Jacob's response. He declared:

- (1) the Lord shall be my God, (that is a very solemn thing for anyone to say),
- (2) this stone which I have set up and anointed shall be God's house,
- (3) I will give one tenth unto Thee.

We can give to God in the house of God in material things. It is a privilege to give in a spiritual way.

G. W. Conway

From **Galston**: We see nine spiritual lessons:

- (1) ^MThe name of the city was Luz at the first". (Strong suggests that Luz was the place where almond trees grew, i. e. the watcher-trees) [Comment 10].

Angels were, no doubt, watching over this man of God's choice (Heb. 1: 14), but God Himself was watching over Jacob.

For today we have the assurance "The Father Himself loveth you" (John 16: 27); and "I also have loved you" (John 15: 9).

- (2) "He lighted upon *the place*" (RVM). This was a crisis in the life of Jacob. We think that there are crisis places in the lives of individual believers with regard to the revelation of the truth of the house of God (Acts 18: 24-26).
- (3) (a) "He took one of the stones of the place", which became a stone of rest. Today the believer's Stone of Rest is Christ.
- (b) He, "took the stone... and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it". Today the house of God is "pillar and ground of the truth", and individual believers in it are to sanctify in their hearts Christ as Lord (1 Pet. 3: 15).

- (4) **"A ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven".**

"Having therefore, **brethren**, boldness to **enter** into **the** holy place **by the** blood of Jesus, **by the way which** He dedicated for **us**, **a new and living way**, through **the veil**, **that is to say**, **His flesh**" (Heb. **10: 19-20**).

- (5) **"Angels of God ascending and descending on it".**

We understand **that John 1: 51 will be fulfilled in the Millennium, but we feel that** not only do **the angels** do **service** on behalf of believers **everywhere, but in some way they** officiate **in** the service of **the house of God** today (Luke **1: 8-11**; Matt. **18: 10**; Acts **5: 19-20**; Luke **15: 7, 10**). [Comment 1].

- (6) **"I am the Lord, the God of Abraham... and... Isaac".**

God reveals Himself to individuals **in the** house of God (**Ps. 27: 4**).

"Ye also are builded together for **a habitation of God in the Spirit**" (Eph. **2: 22**).

"For this **cause I bow my knees** unto **the Father... that He would grant** you... to **apprehend... what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ... that ye may be filled** unto all **the fulness of God**" (Eph. **3: 14-19**).

- (7) **"Jacob rose up early in the morning"**

Are we early risers? Especially on the **Lord's Day?**

- (8) **"Jacob vowed a vow... then shall the Lord be my God... "**

"I **beseech** you therefore, **brethren, by the mercies** of God, to **present** your bodies **a living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable to God, **which is** your reasonable service (Rom. **12: 1**).

- (9) **"... I will surely give the tenth".**

"Let **each** man do according **as he hath** purposed in **his heart**; not grudgingly, or of necessity, for God loveth **a cheerful giver**" (2 Cor. **9: 7**).

J. H. Johnson

From **Leeds**: Genesis, the book of beginnings, has been termed the seed-plot of the Bible. In Genesis God is dealing with individuals and He becomes known as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, dealing directly and personally with them and revealing to them individually His divine will and purposes in many things such as the development of peoples and nations, the offerings, the priesthood, and the house of God [Comment 21. It was to Jacob that God revealed His purposes regarding the house of God, seen in embryo in Genesis 28. The experience of Jacob can be seen as to himself as an individual, made to him before the giving of the Law, and long before the days of the Tabernacle which was later to be established on earth, being built according to a divine pattern, and having divine ordinances and services.

Through the prophet Malachi, God revealed that it was Jacob that He loved. The heritage of Esau, described as a profane person, (Heb. 12: 16), was to be given to the jackals of the wilderness. It was to Jacob that God chose to reveal the truth of the establishing of His house on earth, yet linked to heaven: the gate of heaven providing man with a means of access to God. It was God's choice of the man (the individual) and God's choice of *the place* (Gen. 28: 11 RVM).

Jacob was the "second born", reminding us of our first (natural) birth and, more importantly, of our second (spiritual) birth. It is to those with spiritual discernment, who are indwelt by the Spirit, that God reveals His will (1 Cor. 2: 10-11; 1 Pet. 2: 2-10), giving a spiritual understanding and appreciation of the place where God has set His Name, God's house.

God showed Himself and His purposes in the establishing of His house at Bethel, even though initially it was to be the raising up of one stone to mark the place. God showed His word to Jacob and did not so deal with any other individual or with any of the nations round about (Ps. 147: 19-20). Jacob selected the stone on which to lay his head to sleep, and often, when men sleep, God reveals Himself (Job 33: 14-16). Not all men who sleep receive the vision; many sleep on unaware of the truth of God's house.

Jacob, on awaking, raised his stone as a pillar, a stone of witness. It rested on the ground of truth, the place where the truth of God had been revealed concerning His house (1 Tim. 3: 15). It rested on earth, as later did the Tabernacle and also the Temple. Today God's house rests on earth, comprised of His people, called

together according to His purpose, to the doing of His will (Heb. 3: 6).

When God reveals His will to men He expects responsive action. Jacob took action and vowed his vow.

H. R. Dodge

From Liverpool: Jacob journeyed into the wilderness for four days, the reason being, it was suggested, that he was considering the words of Isaac his father (Gen. 28: 4) [Comment 3]. He then halted in "*the Place*" (v. 11) and laid his head upon a stone. We suggest that "the place" was the dwelling place of God, a thought that was parallel to the threshing floor of Oman (1 Chr. 22: 1). It was pointed out that God always chooses "His place", as was demonstrated by His presence in a cloud over the wilderness. The house of God is still "the place" - God's resting place.

Concerning Jacob's dream, it was thought that it was a revelation which would not be realized until the New Testament. Access to the holies in the Old Testament was representatively through the high priest. Jacob's dream, of a direct ladder from earth to heaven, was beyond his time and experience [Comment 4].

In v. 17 Jacob described "the place" as being "awesome". He obviously realized the significance of it, and was aware of "how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the Church of the Living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3: 15). We ought to have the same realization.

Finally, in v. 20 Jacob appears to make preconditions with God. However, that which might be regarded as preconditions had already been promised by God in vv. 13-15. "If" may be read as "in that case", demonstrating Jacob's remarkable faith.

P. Bentham, A. Davies

From Manchester: In studying the passage on Jacob's dream at Bethel, questions are invariably raised about the individual and the house of God.

The first question to come to light was "What is the meaning of the house of God?" This can be simplistically answered by defining it as the place on earth where God dwells. From this explanation another question arises, "How did Jacob know that it was the house of

God?" It can be proposed that Jacob associated God with the place where he had had the vision and therefore he thought of that place as God's house. Also, it is that divine revelation played a large part in enabling him to recognise that place as the house of God.

The second major question asked for differentiation between the two terms "house of God" and "church of God". The term "house of God" is defined in 1 Tim. 3: 15 as being the "church of the Living God". Therefore from this verse one can propose that the churches of God together form a united association which is termed "the house of God".

The third question was "Who can belong to the house of God?" In response to this it can be suggested that all those who accept the authority of God and are gathered together in accordance with Acts 2: 41-42 may belong to the house of God.

The final question was "Do Christians who are in the house of God have an advantage over those who are not?" [Comment 8]. It can be said that a Christian in the house of God has an opportunity to worship in a more acceptable fashion than a Christian not in the house of God. However, some view this not as an advantage but more of a responsibility, as one has to subject oneself to a higher standard of Christian living. Those in the house of God should be more anti-materialistic and also should be more responsive to the Great Commission (Matt. 28: 19-20). Probably the greatest responsibility or, as some would term it, disadvantage of being in the "house of God" is the separation from the main stream of Christian witness [Comment 9]

It can be seen from the above answer that being in the house of God is not only an honour, but also a great responsibility.

I. McCormick

From Melbourne: To many readers of the narrative concerning Esau and Jacob the impression might be given that Esau was the better man of the two and sympathy felt for him as the victim of callous and deceitful plotting by his mother and brother [See Comment 7]. The struggle, prior to birth, in Rebekah's womb was an omen of things to come and of the strife between the two men. Rebekah in her distress sought unto the Lord and was told that the elder would serve the younger. Doubtless in her special love for the younger she would confide in him and tell of what had been revealed to her. Eager to make God's promise sure, neither was prepared to wait for the

fulfilment of the promise in God's own way, but by deception set about making certain that the promise would be fulfilled, not in God's way but in theirs. They were not aware of the fact that to interfere with God's plans by substituting their own of cruel deception, whatever the apparent success, would bring sorrow, though the objective might appear to have been achieved.

The ^Mfew days" of Rebekah's hopes for her loved son's return from Paddan-aram lengthened out into many years so that they were never to meet again. Had Rebekah been prepared to rest on the word of the Lord (often a difficult thing to do) the divine promise would have been fulfilled in God's time and way. On the other hand Esau, in the sight of God, was a "profane" person, in despising for a morsel of meat his birthright to satisfy his carnal appetite and although he later shed bitter tears the act of a fraction of time could never be recalled (Heb. 12: 16-17). Esau looked only to the present; Jacob looked forward to the future.

As Jacob travelled towards Paddan-aram he lighted upon a certain place, not by chance, for the God of his fathers was guiding him. Hitherto Jacob does not appear to have had any dealings with God, but God's purposes concerning the seed of Abraham His friend are now being brought into focus. Here the God of his fathers was about to meet him and reveal Himself to Jacob, the man of His choice, who was to be the father of nations, and especially of Israel. He was weary with his journey and lay down to sleep with a stone of the place for a pillow. He dreamt and saw a ladder set up on earth and its top reaching to heaven, with the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. But more wonderful still, Jehovah stood above it saying "I am Jehovah, the Elohim of Abraham thy father, and the Elohim of Isaac". Then follow the promises concerning the land upon which he lay and his seed which would be as the dust of the earth. What impressions were now being made upon the man and schemer [Comment 11) Jacob in his first contact with the God whom his fathers knew, and in the further promises following! How great too his fear as he thought of this dreadful place and his first encounter with the Elohim of his fathers - Abraham and Isaac. Here too we suggest he saw, though dimly, the future possibility of a meeting place between God and man, calling it Bethel, or house of God. Here is the first reference to a dwelling for God among men. "How dreadful is this place, this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven". It was here that Abraham stopped on the way to Shechem and offered sacrifice (Gen. 12: 8; 13: 3). It was

here that Jacob many years later met Elohim on his return from Paddan-aram and confirmed the Abrahamic covenant to him. It was here he worshipped and called the place Elbethel and it was here that his name was changed from Jacob to Israel [Comment 5].

Bethel was for many years accepted as a place of worship by Israel, as a place where God met men, and where sacrifices were offered upon the altar (1 Sam. 10: 3). It never became the site of the house of God and later in the history of Israel became the dwelling place of one of the golden calves set up by Jereboam, king of the ten tribes [Comment 6].

T. L. Fullerton, T. W. Fullerton

From Methil: The house of God is one of the great main-line truths found throughout Scripture. The first mention is in Genesis 28 where God reveals it to an individual, Jacob. God did so by means of a dream. Today this truth is given through the Bible, by the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, to each individual willing to know His will.

God also promised Jacob that He would be with him, as the Lord Jesus promised the disciples, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28). Jacob learned personally that there is communion between God and man. God promised him great blessings physically and materially in this land. We also are blessed but with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph. 1: 3) [Comment 13].

When Jacob discovered where he was he exclaimed, ^MHow dreadful is this place". He was filled with awe at the thought that God actually wanted to dwell with men. Jacob evidently had an appreciation of the holiness of God.

" The house of God is where God dwells on earth and this is the gate of heaven; it is the place of approach to God. Only in the house of God can we enter heaven as a holy priesthood on Lord's Day morning (Heb. 10: 19-20).

Jacob set up a pillar or something that could be seen. It was a testimony, a witness and he called the name of that place Bethel "The house of God". It was called Luz in earlier times. Luz means "departure", yet this did not deter God from establishing witness there. Even so today God can take up those who were no people to be the people of God in the house of God

Jacob promised to give back to God a tenth of all that God gave him. As we prosper so we should give to God in acknowledgement that He has first given to us. There is, of course, no mandatory tithing today, but God does love a cheerful giver.

N. Coomer

From Nottingham: Jacob must have been a very unhappy man when he ^Mwent out from Beersheba". He was leaving behind the environment he loved, his tent home (25: 27), his mother, who had a special love for him which he, no doubt, reciprocated (25: 28) and, to make matters worse he was living under Esau's threat to kill him (27: 41). So although the purpose of his journey, which was to find a wife, may have brought him some joy he must have left home with a heavy and fearful heart. Rebekah had again shown that special "protective"¹¹ type of love which she had for her younger son. She knew of Esau's threat (27: 42) and devised the scheme to send Jacob to Laban her brother. Rebekah's persuasive words to her son (27: 42-45) seem to show firstly Rebekah's anxiety to engineer a way of escape for Jacob and, secondly, Jacob's reluctance and fear. Rebekah said ^M... tarry with him (Laban) a *few days*... then I will send, and fetch thee from thence". Such were her intentions, but it was not to be so. God had other purposes. Neither Jacob nor Rebekah could have known then that many years were to elapse before Jacob was to meet his father again. So far as we know from the Scriptures, when Rebekah saw her son leave that day she was destined never to see him again in this life. God's ways are different from ours.

So when Jacob lighted upon "the place" he may have considered himself as he lay down to rest a distraught, fearful, lonely and desolate man. Had he been seen there by some passer-by he might have been dismissed as nothing but an ordinary nomad, an insignificant man. But how different was that man in the eyes of the Almighty God of heaven! He who knows the end from the beginning saw in Jacob the one who had been chosen to be the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, a link in the chain of divine testimony leading to the Messiah and to the blessing of all the nations. As we receive individuals into a church of God, who can tell what place they are to play in the purposes of God in conjunction with His house?

Jacob is an example of an individual who was brought by God out of one environment into another so that God could further His purposes in him. Whatever Jacob understood of God's intentions previously it seems clear that He started His direct dealings with

the man in that lonely spot as he rested on his journey. There would be little attractive to the natural man in that spot, but in God's sight this was the place of His choice. Thus, in our day, God calls men and women out of the surroundings in which He is given no place to such a place of His choice where He can reveal Himself to receptive hearts.

The words "a certain place" (28:11), more correctly "the place"¹¹ (see RVM), are important. It is interesting to notice the place is mentioned six times in the portion: the place, that place, this place. It was the place of God's choice, a principle which underlines the truth of the house of God now as it did then. Please compare Abraham being directed to "one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" and which is also described as "the place". Note too that this links with 1 Chr. 22: 1 and 2 Chr. 3: 1, and the vital principle enunciated in Deut. 12:13-14.

Jacob was dealt with by God as an individual and, as such, he was faced with the truth of the house of God. Abraham was called by God as an individual (Is. 51: 2), as was Paul (Acts 22: 9) and in 1 Peter 2 we have the born-again person who is willing to obey God's command being built, as a living stone, into the spiritual house. The title house of God is a term applied to the place despite there being no building there. It is the presence of God that marks the place as His house and later the same title is used concerning the erection of the pillar of stone (Gen. 28: 22), thus we have the place of God's choice and the building on the place. The stone erected by Jacob was different from all other stones in that its erection was a testimony before men as to the special nature of the place. Men are required to build as a testimony to the fact that the place is where God dwells. Jacob realized the revelation concerning the place required a response in service and entered voluntarily into the arrangement of tithing.

Verses 16 and 17 of chapter 28 imply that the significance of the place to which he had come was not realized immediately by Jacob, but only after reflection did the truth of its being the house of God dawn upon him. In a similar way it was thought that some believers may be in a church of God for some time before they realize and grasp the truth of the house of God. This may be true particularly of those younger in the Faith and does not apply in every case.

R. Hickling

From Vancouver: Men of God "have been since the world began" (Acts 3: 21). These men were helped and guided by His "holy prophets" who were moved by and taught by the Holy Spirit. We find God in due time choosing Abraham for further revelation in God's great plan of salvation, which plan is confirmed to his grandson - Jacob. Abraham got the blessing of the Melchizedekan priesthood (Gen. 14: 18-20). This blessing fell also upon his (Abraham's) sons of like character [Comment 14].

Jacob realized that the place of two-way communion could be called the house of God, the gate of heaven. Although no temple or house is mentioned in association with the Melchizedekan priesthood in Genesis 14, this priest ministered to the individual in his service for God to Abraham.

God chose to teach Jacobus later generations many things through the Aaronic priesthood. This was also set aside, but the lesson remained. Christ Jesus, who has sat down at God's right hand, ministers at the throne of grace whereby each individual can "receive mercy, and may find grace to help" such as Jacob was needing and found from a gracious God. Jacob, as his father Abraham did, looked for a city whose builder and maker is God. The scenes in the New Jerusalem confirm the unseen experiences of the place of his dream. It was God's house although he knew it only by the presence of God; by God's voice and God's listening ear, and God's faithfulness. John said he saw no temple in the New Jerusalem, a fitting expression of the Melchizedekan priesthood. For the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb are the temple thereof (Rev. 21: 22). The garments of its citizens, the food and drink of priceless blessings, the eternal presence of God, His guidance and protection will more than satisfy Jacob through the glad forever!

In Abraham's experience the priest is mentioned, in Jacob's experience the house of God. Stephen in his Spirit-filled oration says "the Most High dwelleth not in houses made with hands". The true house of God is made of living stones for Christ and the Melchizedekan priesthood, for this day of grace and the eternal Day. I will dwell in them and walk with them [Comment 15], was God's desire which will be fulfilled.

H. McLeman

COMMENTS

1. (Galston): This raises a very interesting point. It is not without significance that angels figure so prominently in the vision that Jacob had. The scriptures listed mainly illustrate the ministry of angels in their service on behalf of those that inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14), but portions such as Hebrews 12: 22-24 show that service in the house of God today is associated with a heavenly order of service.

2. **(Leeds):** ^A study of the book of Genesis would seem to show that although Jacob and others offered sacrifices to God their appreciation of sacrifices and offerings was limited. A detailed revelation was given at a later date when God spoke to Moses from the Tabernacle that had been set up in accordance with divine instruction.

There is little information in the Scriptures in relation to priests and priestly work in the days of the patriarchs. Abraham received the benefit of the ministry of Melchizedek who was a priest of God Most High, but detailed instructions relating to a priesthood serving God according to His will were given from the Tabernacle. God then had a people in covenant relationship with Himself, and to them He gave ordinances of divine service.

3. (Liverpool): The distance from Beersheba to Bethel as measured on most Biblical maps is some 50 miles. That being so the distance might represent some two-day's journey, but I do not follow the reasoning behind the suggestion that it took four days.

4. (Liverpool): This is true. The outstanding feature of Jacob's vision was the "ladder" or staircase that linked earth and heaven, and this aspect of truth relative to the house of God finds its fulfilment in association with the spiritual house. The spiritual house on earth is linked with the sanctuary in heaven, a way of access having been opened up to permit the entry of the holy priesthood into the holy place in heaven (Heb. 9: 24; 10: 19-22).

5. **(Melbourne):** Of course the new name of "Israel" had been given to him at Peniel. The reason for the change had also been given, "For thou hast striven with God and with men, and hast prevailed", (Gen. 32: 28). The pronouncement in Genesis 35: 10 appears to be a confirmation of the change given at Bethel.

6. (Melbourne): It would appear from Judges 20: 27 that for a period of time the Ark of God, and presumably the Tabernacle also, was at Bethel. 1 Samuel 10: 3 may also indicate that the Tabernacle, without the Ark, was again at Bethel although it is clear that in the days of Eli the Tabernacle was situated at Shiloh.

7. **(Brantford):** Editors have already made a distinction between Jacob's actions in obtaining the birthright and his actions in obtaining the blessing. See Editorial and Comment 1 B. S. 8301 and Editorial and Comment 5 B. S. 8302. *J. K. D. J.*

8. **(Manchester):** I would not like to express it in this way; it is the place of worship, rather than the fashion of worship which is important. God has legislated for the worship of a holy priesthood in His house, and when we have discerned the call of God to it, we must obey. I would rather not attempt to pronounce upon the acceptability of the worship of others before God; this is a matter for Him.

9. **(Manchester):** I would deny that this is so. Paul preached "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20: 27). The stream of God's purpose flowed through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, promising the "seed" and giving the blessings of the "house"; God's dwelling-place among the redeemed. The divine election to salvation and service remains the main-stream of God's purpose. The fact that some aspects are neglected by some believers does not lessen that.

P. L. H.

10. **(Galston):** The more usual meaning of Luz is "departure", as is mentioned by friends in Methil. Bethel was outside Luz (Josh. 16: 2) indicating that God does not dwell where there is departure from Him. It is very suggestive that Jacob pursued a separated path by not entering the city. As a result of this he found himself in the Place of the Name. The name of the city apparently extended to ground beyond it and included the Place renamed by Jacob. It may be that in the change of names we have the view of the Place as seen by the natural man and the spiritual man.

11. **(Melbourne):** The story so far presents no evidence that Jacob was a schemer. He obtained the birthright by seizing an opportunity that unexpectedly presented itself. In the matter of the blessing, it was his mother who schemed. Jacob was far from enthusiastic in his participation.

12. **(Melbourne):** Abraham camped between Bethel and Ai. (Gen. 12: 8, 13: 3).

13. **(Methil):** Friends in Methil are quite right to associate Jacob's being at Bethel with his possession of the birthright and the blessing. See also how Manasseh was supplanted by Ephraim (Gen. 48: 8-22) and how the dwelling-place of God was situated in the inheritance of

Ephraim (Ps. 81: 1-5). But the blessings of Eph. 1: 3 are associated with being in Christ not with the believer's pursuit of the will of God.

14. (**Vancouver**): Friends in Vancouver make some points about the priesthood of Melchizedek which are hard to understand. Melchizedek appears and disappears in Genesis 14 so that he had no connection with any of the Patriarchs other than Abraham. Nor has he any connection with the house of God in Genesis. It is not clear how the absence of a temple in the New Jerusalem is a "fitting expression of the Melchizedekan priesthood" when friends later say that "the true house of God is made... for. .. the Melchizedekan priesthood". The connection with Melchizedek and the house of God is that he was a priest when there was no house of God and no people of God. In the same way, the Lord is a priest whether there is a house of God or not for He "hath His priesthood unchangeable" (Heb. 7: 24).

15. (**Vancouver**): "I will dwell in them" (2 Cor. 6: 16) is the language of this dispensation. "Dwell with them" is the language of the future day (Rev. 21: 3).

I. E. P.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. From **Cowdenbeath**: How are we to understand the use of the divine title "Jehovah" (LORD) in Genesis 28: 13, 16 in the light of the statement in Exodus 6: 2-3 ?

The emphatic statement, "but by My Name Jehovah I was not known unto them" is somewhat perplexing because the Name Jehovah occurs frequently in the book of Genesis. Usually it is translated "LORD". Dr. Newberry points out that it first occurs in association with *Elohim* in Genesis 2: 4 (LORD God, Jehovah Elohim), but it is first used alone in Genesis 4: 1, 3 where it is used by Eve. Examples of its use by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob could be given (e. g. Gen. 14: 22; 26: 22, 27: 20).

Perhaps the simplest explanation of the difficulty is that the Name was used but its meaning had not been made known. The NIV margin offers the following translation for Ex. 6: 3; "By My Name the LORD did I not let Myself be known to them", and the RSV offers a similar translation.

God gives His own exposition of the Name to Moses in Ex. 3: 14 as, "I AM THAT I AM" (Heb. *Ehyeh* RVM) and Ex. 3: 15 shows that this is equivalent to "THE LORD" (Heb. Jehovah, from the same root as *Ehyeh* RVM).

Jehovah, however, was the Name by which God was to be made known to Israel. It was to be His covenant Name. J. K. D. J.

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Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17:11]

EDITORIAL

8804

Again and again the Old Testament narratives remind us of the Lord's word to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12: 9). God had chosen to fulfil His purposes on earth through the descendants of Abraham. Isaac was the child of promise, and before his sons were born God chose Jacob to be the **heir** of the **promises** and rejected Esau (Rom. 9: 11-13). The choice was made regardless of whatever the character of Jacob might have been. Then the grace of God followed Jacob, protecting him and leading him to trust God more fully as time went on. Yet, although God had chosen him and guided the overall direction of his life there were some facets of his experience that were the result of human manoeuvring and deception, and it is one of these which is studied in this issue.

Jacob who had deceived Isaac was himself deceived by Laban when he substituted Leah for Rachel. Was it God's will that this should be done? It was surely not God's desire that Laban should deceive Jacob, or that Jacob should engage in polygamy. The assertion that He ordained these things would make Him guilty of conniving at them. We must distinguish between the prescriptive will of God and His permissive will. His sovereign choice of Jacob was made irrespective of human will, but His purposes in Jacob were worked out through actions which depended upon the will of the character concerned. Hence the progenitors of Israel as a nation were born under circumstances that were less than ideal, but God nonetheless used them to build up a people for Himself. Jacob's offspring had nothing in themselves to make them attractive to God, but He said through Isaiah, "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy redeemer is the Holy One of Israel" (Is. 41: 14). We can often see our own weaknesses in the weaknesses of Jacob, and we can imitate his faith, saying for ourselves, "We know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8: 28).

THE CHIEF CORNER STONE

Zechariah was giving **much needed** encouragement to **Zerubbabel** when he told him the word of the Lord, "**Zerubbabel... shall bring forth the head stone** with shoutings of **Grace, grace, unto it**" (4: 7). **Many years had elapsed** since **Zerubbabel had led the faithful remnant in the laying of the foundation of the restored house of God**. **There had been delays and difficulties** but now God was about to remove **them all**, however insurmountable **they may have seemed to the men of Judah**. **Zerubbabel was not to despise the day of small things; he would see his long cherished desire fulfilled, triumphantly finishing the building by putting in place its top-most stone with great rejoicing.**

Many Christian writers, **perhaps with Zechariah's prophecy in mind, regard the head of the corner** (Ps. 118: 22; Mat. 21: 42; Mark 12: 10; Luke 20: 17; Acts 4: 11; 1 Pet. 2: 7) **as a stone at the top of a building holding parts of the building together**. Some suggest **this is a figure of Christ as Head of the Church the Body**; others go **further and see it as Christ uniting Jew and Gentile in the Church the Body as a head stone would bind together two pillars**. **Colour is lent to these ideas by the NIV use of the word capstone in the verses noted above where RV translates head of the corner**. Later editions of NIV do however insert "or cornerstone" **in the margin**. The corresponding **phrase in the Greek is kephalengonias, but it seems to be closely linked with akrogoniaios** (Eph. 2: 20; 1 Pet. 2: 6) which both **RV and NIV translate either chief cornerstone or simply cornerstone***

To interpret **the "head of the corner"** as referring to the Lord's position in relation to **the Church the Body is dubious for, looking at the reference in 1 Pet. 2: 7, the context is that of the house of God**. **If any student is unsure of that, let him compare the chapter with Ephesians chapter 2 and Hebrews 3: 1-7**. **Again, in 1 Pet. 2: 6 a passage from Isaiah 28: 16 is quoted. Referring back to the source, we read in Isaiah, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone of sure foundation..."** **Peter did not quote word for word and omitted direct reference to the foundation, but he would assume his readers understood the background of the Isaiah passage**. As we **have seen, the preceding verse (1 Pet. 2: 6) uses the same Greek word as in Eph. 2: 20 where the context is again the house of God**. Whether the house of God is **in view in verse 19 may be a matter for discussion, but verses 21 and 22 cannot otherwise be understood, and these verses are tied in grammatically and logically connected to verse 20**. Some **may see a difficulty here for "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" seems rather at odds with "other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"** (1 Cor. 3: 11). **If the chief corner stone is in an important**

place **at the top of the building, the difficulty may be a real one, but if it is the first** and most important stone laid **in the foundation, then the apostle Paul, who wrote both epistles, is not inconsistent. He, and the other apostles, taught the disciples the things** concerning the kingdom of God just as **the Lord Jesus Christ had taught them** (Gal. 1: 12; Acts 1: 3).

In **Peter's first epistle the close link between verse 6 of chapter 2, where chief cornerstone is cited from Isaiah, and verse 7, where head of the corner is cited from Psalm 118, suggests that the NIV use of capstone instead of the RV head of the corner is open to criticism. Head (Gk. kephale)** does not **here imply topmost as some suggest but it has a meaning similar to that in some English words such as headmaster. 1 Cor. 11: 3 has the word head with this figurative meaning, whereas the verses which follow use it in its literal sense. The Greek word is the same throughout.**

Former building **practice supports the idea that the head of the corner or chief corner stone was part of the foundation. A stone building would be commenced by choosing a large stone which had been very accurately chiselled and placing it carefully in position at one corner of the foundation. It was the first stone laid and from it stretched out in three dimensions the walls of the building. Thus all the building was carefully lined up, preserving and extending the right angles and lines initiated by the chief corner stone. This was the stone which enabled the builders to construct the edifice in accordance with the design given to them by the architect. The application of this analogy to the building of the house of God today is clear, emphasizing the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ in God's house and the necessity of keeping to the divine pattern.**

After the healing of the lame man recorded in Acts 3, Peter in his defence before the rulers of the Jews said, "Jesus Christ of Nazareth... He is the stone which was set at nought of you the builders, which was made the head of the corner", so explaining the Lord's reference to Psalm 118: 22 after the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Mark 12, Luke 20). The stone masonry figure is helpful again here: the builders (the chief priests and rulers) had examined the stone (Messiah) but it did not fit their design for what should have been God's house. They could not build their edifice of worldly ambition upon that divine foundation, so they rejected Him.

As we build the house of God let us use gold, silver, costly stones, mined from the word of God and founded upon the Lord Jesus Christ. "The fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is".

*L. Burrows,
Kingston upon Thames*

FINDING A WIFE (Gen. 27: 46-29: 1-30)

From Birkenhead: There were several matters which we felt it important to discuss, as they seemed to form a backcloth to the particular aspect of Jacob's pilgrimage which we were examining.

We were reminded of Gen. 2: 24, which clearly showed the intentions of God with regard to man and woman, and we remarked on the fact that God allowed polygamy to be practised in the days before the Law was given [Comment 11]. Consideration was also given to Paul's views expressed in 1 Cor. 7, and it was observed that he was responding to particular questions which had been put to him. He also took account of the view that such men as himself felt better able to serve the Lord without the responsibilities of a wife.

Armed with these thoughts, we saw clearly that God had a purpose in mind for Jacob, and in fulfilling that purpose he used a number of other people. The fact that Esau's marriages were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah led them to direct Jacob (whom we estimate to be over seventy years of age at this time) to leave the area and travel some hundreds of miles in order that he might not choose a wife from the daughters of Caanan, but from his mother's family [Comment 1].

As we have already considered, Jacob had an experience on the journey, part of which involved a promise from the Lord (Gen. 28: 15), and which indicated God's overruling care for him in his coming days. On arrival he was warmly welcomed and taken into the heart of the family, and it is clear that he experienced an immediate attraction to Rachel, which blossomed and grew (Gen. 29: 20).

Both Laban and Jacob were satisfied with the bargain which was agreed with regard to the marriage, and Jacob fulfilled his resulting responsibility. We discussed at some length the reason given for the deception perpetrated against Jacob by Laban, and the genuineness or otherwise of his reason. We could reach no conclusion other than that the Lord overruled, evidence of this being the birth to Leah of Judah, whose name appears in the genealogy of the Lord [Comment 2], Such was Jacob's love, however, that he was prepared to undertake a further seven years' service after marrying Rachel (a total of 14 years' service for Rachel).

In an attempt to spiritualise the events, we looked at Rachel and

Leah as representative of joy and difficulty, or weariness, which may affect the life of the disciple (who is also a pilgrim in this world).

Our greatest lesson, however, proved to be the recognition that the Lord would direct, in the question of partners, both away from some areas and towards others, in order that His requirements might be fulfilled.

R. C. Halpin, A. Hyland

From Brantford: The first item that we come across in our reading is that Jacob had been sent by his parents to find a wife of the daughters of Laban. They were not interested at all in the daughters of Canaan and sent him with their blessing to a foreign country [Comment 3]. Jacob listened to, and obeyed the request of his parents and left on his journey with very few things with him (Gen. 28: 11).

In chapter 28 Jacob had a dream in which the Lord spoke to him, telling him of the things which were planned for him (vv. 13, 14) and comforted him (v. 15). The marginal note accompanying 29: 1 reads that Jacob ^Mlifted up his feet", or in other words was in a better, more peaceful frame of mind for going on his journey. Since Jacob had no Bible from which to learn of God's will, we can easily understand why Jacob was so happy. The Lord had spoken to him and told him he would never leave him. This should make us all the more thankful for the opportunity we have for close communion with God.

We next see Jacob at the well. Looking back one generation, to the time that Abraham's servant was sent to find a wife for Isaac, we can compare the experiences of the two men. There seem to be many differences in the initial approach of the two men. Jacob did not take time out to seek the counsel of the Almighty, while the servant asked humbly of God that he would be with him and guide him and make speed in his journey. It is interesting to note that the servant was on his way home in a very short time while Jacob had to work seven years for the wife God seemed to have planned for him. It is a pity that we limit God by our lack of faith [Comment 12 1.

It became fairly certain to us that Leah, Rachel's older sister, was God's chosen wife for Jacob and not Rachel, even though Jacob favoured Rachel for her beauty [Comment 4][Comment 13]. Leah was not only the mother of most of Jacob's children, but included in her children were: Judah, the next link in the line of Christ and, Levi, the beginning of the line of priests for God's house. It was pointed

out that if there was no Rachel then there would be no Joseph, the favoured son of Jacob and ruler in the land of Egypt. We learned from this that God still works out His purpose even though He gives us the freedom to do our own will.

It is interesting to study the deceptions in Jacob's life. First as the deceiver, he deceived his father, then Laban deceived him, and then his own sons deceived him about Joseph. In every case there was favouritism involved in the situation [Comment 14].

It is also interesting to note that God dealt with Jacob with hopes that he would be helped and guided and taught. What a wonderful thing it is to know that God speaks to us and chastises us when necessary, before our life is over. God wants us to learn His ways and not continue in our own old ways. If this were not so we would continue in our old "ruts" and instead of growing closer to God we would come to the judgement falling very far short of God's expectations.

G. Douglas

From Cowdenbeath: Some of the marriages of Genesis foreshadow various aspects of Christ and the Church which is His Body.

In the case of Adam and Eve foreshadowings include the building and the presenting of Gen. 2: 22. With Rebekah it was a case of loving one she had never seen (see Gen. 24: 58 and 1 Pet, 1: 8). In Joseph's case he was given Asenath to be his wife when Pharaoh called him Zaphenath-paneah, i.e. the saviour of the world. Here in our study we have the unquenchable love of Jacob by which he was prepared to suffer as he did in order to win his bride (Gen. 31: 40).

The expression, "finding a wife" carries with it the suggestion of discovering someone in God's plan of things. For Jacob this was never a matter of choosing from among alternatives. There is no alternative. God directed the project to completion, subject to Jacob's submissive heart [Comment 5]. Thus it was with Isaac and now with Jacob also. The negative is stressed as a warning in both chapters 24 and 28. The positive command was to take a wife from among their own people. This lesson follows through to 1 Cor. 7: 39.

Evidently Esau had learned nothing from the experience of his father. He chose women from Canaan, and the consequences were widespread (27: 46). Later, it seems, he was influenced by the willing obedience of Jacob (28: 7) and took Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael

to be his wife (28: 8, 9) [Comment 6] .

Jacob had had the memorable experience of Bethel and in the encouragement of that revelation "lifted up his feet" on his journey east. The circumstances of his meeting with Rachel suggest that he was beginning to recognize the guiding hand of God in his life rather than attempting in his own strength to manoeuvre things to suit himself. His acts in verses 10 and 11 suggest spontaneous acts of joy at God's guidance.

Whether or not it was love at first sight, Jacob's was a constant love that showed no variation despite the deceit of Laban and the rigours of service imposed over fourteen years. Indeed ch. 29: 20 explains that the seven years originally contracted with Laban "seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her".

The prominence of Rachel over Leah in God's purposes is seen in Hosea 12: 12 and in Ruth 4: 11 where, despite Leah having been given first in marriage, Rachel's name gains the ascendancy.

R. I. Shaw

From Derby: We noted the difference between this incident and Gen. 24 where Eliezer, Abraham's servant, goes to seek a wife for Isaac. He took a rich present and prayed to the Lord for guidance in this important matter. Rebekah was presented to Isaac and she became his wife. It was a type of the Church being presented to Christ as the Bride.

Jacob went to seek a bride. He did not put himself outside of God's will by marrying a heathen woman as his brother had done. Nevertheless, there is no mention of any prayer to the Lord [Comment 12 I and as he had come with no gift he had to labour to purchase Rachel for himself. He loved Rachel. She was beautiful and the time passed quickly. Oh, the disappointment when he found that he had married Leah. Laban's trickery must have reminded Jacob of his own former deceitfulness when dealing with his father. Leah, also must have been a party to her father's deception. She went through with it because she loved Jacob. He readily consented to marrying two wives although this was against the practice of his father and his grandfather [Comment 9] . Esau had more than one wife and we see him condemned, but it was for their origin and not their number. Jacob worked for 14 years for his wives. Christ as servant served and gave Himself to purchase a Bride for Himself. We in the Churches

of God today should marry only in the Lord. Had the best qualities of Leah and Rachel been combined in one wife she would have made a good companion for Jacob. The despised Leah, who was the more spiritually minded and had the self-discipline, was exalted and became the mother of the priestly and kingly tribes of Levi and Judah.

G. W. Conway

From Galston: "The daughters of Heth", the "daughters of the land" and "the daughters of Canaan" were alike in that they did not worship Jehovah and "how shall two walk together except they be agreed?" Agreement on the worship of God must have the first priority when considering the matter of a partner for life.

Judith and Basemath were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah. It reveals the character of Esau that he seems to have been unconcerned with their ways. Jacob was told "Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and take a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban, thy mother's brother". Why? Because Gen. 24: 31, 50; 29: 32, 33, 35; 30: 18, 20, 24, 27 all indicate that Bethuel and Laban and their families had a knowledge of God and worshipped (however imperfectly) Jehovah.

Jacob obeyed his father and mother; i. e. he was obedient to the instruction of the Lord through his parents. The teaching of the Lord reaches us through the apostles - Marry "only in the Lord" and "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers"! Comment 10], Obedience to the teaching brings great peace (Ps. 119: 165); disobedience, sorrows multiplied (Ps. 16: 4).

"Behold, I am with thee..." (Gen. 28: 15). Jacob now had the assurance of God's guidance in his purpose to find a wife. No wonder his step was light (Gen. 29: 1 RVM). To the Christian today He says, "I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any way forsake thee".

The moving of the stone from the well's mouth was a feat of great strength. It was evidently a work for two or more, yet Jacob did it alone and also watered Laban's flock which would be exhausting work. This, together with the shepherds' hostility, (their laconic "We know him" says much) must have been very trying to a man who was not an aggressive type. We think too that the story of how Abraham's servant on a similar mission had stood by a well (almost 100 years before) and had his prayer so miraculously answered by

God, might well have come into his mind. Under standingly then we see him both kissing Rachel and lifting up his voice and weeping.

"Jacob loved Rachel" and was prepared to serve seven years for her. "They (the 7 years) seemed unto him but a few days for the love he had to her".

"In the morning... behold it was Leah". A great shock. "Fulfil the week of this one" (i.e. the 7 days of the feast to celebrate his marriage with Leah) "and we will give thee the other...". Jacob got Rachel also at the end of seven years, not after 14 years.

J. H. Johnson

From Liverpool: The way Jacob set about finding himself a wife reveals little of value to us today except to serve as a warning. It seems to have been:

1. *An after-thought* - his flight from home was to escape the fury of his enraged brother and that he should seek to acquire a wife while away from "the women of this land" was only secondary to his personal safety [Comment 7].
2. *Love at first sight* - Jacob had never met Rachel before and knew nothing about her character, interests or attitude to God and His things [Comment 8].
3. *A recipe for domestic disharmony* - Jacob, having been cheated out of his real love, shows to the unfortunate Leah that she is unwanted, unloved and will never have her rightful place as first wife. Her hurt, together with the frustration of Rachel at being unable to produce a child, led to bitterness and a low state of man-wife relationship!

Unlike the story of Isaac and Rebekah there is no record of any asking for the Lord's guidance and yet in spite of this God clearly overruled in the life of Jacob for out of this unhappy situation came the people of Israel. Together with the warning we can take heart that whatever mess we may make of our lives God can overrule and enable blessing to come to others through us in spite of ourselves [Comment 15].

We recognize that in looking for a partner today he or she must not only be "in the Lord" in obedience to God, but also "of the Lord" to ensure suitability, harmony and peace. It is wise to ask the Lord's

guidance even if at first, like Jacob, it stems from a physical attraction between two persons who share an appreciation of the Lord and His things.

D. J. Webster

From Melbourne: We have previously referred to some of the characteristics of Esau's life-style as summarised in Heb. 12: 16-17, which he was never able to rectify. We now refer to the life-style of Jacob as found in Gen. 25: 27, and margin. He was quiet or harmless (Heb: "perfect"). He was, we judge, much more amenable to the counsel of his parents than was Esau. As yet he is not referred to as having formed any attachment with women with a view to marriage; this was in contrast to Esau, whose wives were taken apparently without any advice from either Isaac or Rebekah and without any thought to the line of Abraham. They were women who had no knowledge of God and no knowledge of the first principles of righteousness, who had become a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac had been instructed by his father regarding his descendants, the manner of life which was becoming to those who feared God, and the future of the land which one day would be theirs. There was no place in God's purposes for the daughters of Heth. When Rebekah heard of the purposes of Esau towards Jacob, she went to Isaac and emphasized the fact that she was weary of the daughters of Heth, and expressed the fear, "If Jacob take a wife... such as these, of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?". Although there was doubtless an element of fear for the life of her son Jacob, we judge that fear of the moral effects of such a marriage would be predominant. The seed of Abraham must not be contaminated by the practices of the people of the land. Isaac remembered what doubtless he had heard of his father's servant, Eliezer, and the commission given to him when sent to Paddan-aram to seek a bride for Isaac. He, following in his father's footsteps, took the same course with Jacob, instructing him, "Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Paddan-aram... and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother".

Jacob willingly obeyed his parents, and leaving the place of his birth, and many eligible maidens of the land, he started his journey to a land which he had never seen. He went to seek a bride (whom he had never seen) from among his own kindred; one of those to whom the divine promise had been given. Although the journey was taken at the desire and request of his parents, there was also an element of faith in what he was doing. On the journey he was to be brought

into contact with **the God of his father, and be given the assurance, "I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of".**

The **heart-warming** scene brought before us as **he met his** cousin Rachel, **keeping her father's** sheep, **and** his spontaneous love towards **her**, which was immediately reciprocated **by her**, was compensation for **his** journey from **Canaan**. When Laban asked **him what his wages would be, they agreed** upon seven years¹ service for **his** younger **daughter**, Rachel. **He did** not discover **just then that**, according to **the** custom of **the** country, **he** could not **have the** younger before **the** elder; and Leah must become **his** first wife. **But the** love of Jacob was predominantly **with** Rachel, although **in the** purposes of God, **and** according to **the** laws **and** custom of **the** land, **it** was through Rachel, Leah **and their** handmaidens **that the** foundations of **the** nation of Israel **were** laid.

The promise **had** been **given** to **Abraham** and renewed to Jacob, **"in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed"**. In Gal. 3: 16, it is **emphasized that it is the** Christ who is primarily **in view in this** promise.

In this most important **matter in the** life of a young disciple, **there are** lessons to be learned from **the lives of Esau and Jacob**. In the case of **the** former **it appears** unlikely **that he had ever** sought counsel from **his** parents. **It is** worth **taking** stock of the history of Jacob **in this** regard. **He had** complete confidence **in** both **Isaac and Rebekah**, although we cannot condone **the** deception of **Isaac** in order to obtain **the** patriarchal blessing. We stated our **minds** last month with **regard** to this, to **the** effect that **if Rebekah and Jacob had left it to the God of Abraham and Isaac, He would have** brought about **what they desired in His own way and time**. The **experience of Isaac** was a **weighty** factor **in leading** Jacob **aright at this time** of crisis; Isaac's **emphatic charge** was, "Thou shalt not **take a wife of the daughters of Canaan**". The **personal experience** of both **Rebekah and Isaac with the daughters of Heth may have** taught Jacob some lessons **that were deterrents to keep him from having** any thoughts of **making** any advances towards **the "daughters of the land"**.

Young **disciples, brought up in a home where they are under** instruction from **the Scriptures; where** counsel is **taken** from God-fearing **parents and** others, **have** often avoided sorrow **and spiritual** disaster **by not taking a life-partner in an unequal yoke which would have been** of the most damaging character.

W. H. Fullerton, T. W. Fullerton

From Nottingham: In this passage we find several principles to do with the main subject, (Finding a wife) and also a few others not really connected with this. Earlier, Jacob had obtained the birth-right but had deceived his father Isaac to get the blessing. When Laban gave Jacob Leah instead of Rachel he deceived him and this brings out the principle in Gal. 6: 7 that a man reaps what he sows. Jacob was later deceived again by his sons in the incident with Joseph's coat (Gen. 37: 31-15).

When Jacob left his home and journeyed to Paddan-aram, it was the beginning of years of mixed experience for him. Firstly, there were his experiences with Laban and his daughters and later his experiences with his own sons, who were to become God's people. Whenever Jacob might have felt sad and thought that everything was going wrong for him, in fact God was in complete control, working his own purpose out and making a people for Himself, through Jacob's trials and triumphs. The principle here then is that ^Mto them that love God, all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8: 28).

God had a purpose in Jacob's life and so for this reason he was not free to marry just anyone. Neither are believers free to marry whoever they want to. Jacob's wife had to be of the right birth; so has the believer's - the new birth. 2 Cor. 6: 14 says, ^MBe not unequally yoked with unbelievers" [Comment 10], and this is shown in the portion where Jacob was instructed not to marry a Hittite woman but a woman of his own family line. So we must marry only in the Lord (1 Cor. 7: 39), i. e. to someone who is baptized and added to a Church of God. This is one of our responsibilities as disciples. As Jacob's life shows, it is not all plain sailing and accordingly Christians' married lives are bound to have their ups and downs. God sent Rachel to the well and to Jacob and if we ask for God's guidance through prayer, He will lead us to the right person, if it is His will that we should be married. So we should follow His leading and not our own fancy. Finally the most important thing in marriage is love and we are told that Jacob loved Rachel. If this is missing the marriage will never be a success. Love is essential.

T. Elson

COMMENTS

1. **(Birkenhead):** The instruction to Jacob was not given merely because Esau's marriages were unsatisfactory; Isaac perceived that

the blessing of God Almighty on Abraham was to be passed down through Jacob (28: 4), and it was not proper that the godly line should be joined to idolaters. It appears that Rebekah put the idea of sending Jacob to Haran at this time into the mind of Isaac, to fulfil her plan to keep Jacob away from Esau.

2_o (**Birkenhead**): It seems quite clear that Jacob was deliberately deceived by Laban, and Laban's reply was a mere excuse. He had had seven years in which to make the position plain! The fact that the Lord used the situation which arose does not justify Laban's action; God will carry out His purposes whatever men do.

3. (**Brantford**): The people to whom he was sent were not foreign.

4. (**Brantford**): I do not think that we can justifiably make statements of this sort. Jacob was tricked into taking Leah, and the line to Christ continues through her son, but this does not imply that God had chosen Leah for Jacob. It is always difficult for us to understand the interface between the free choices of individuals and the fore-ordination of God. Has each man a "chosen wife" selected by God? What happens if he does not marry this person? Or does God ensure that he does? Although believing in God's choice to salvation, one would not care to think that God irresistably directs every action in our lives, or our responsibility would be completely removed.

5. (**Cowdenbeath**): This raises the question discussed above once more. Did God "direct"¹¹ the substitution of Leah for Rachel, or Jacob's subsequent polygamy?

6. (**Cowdenbeath**): Esau never understood the reasons for Jacob's seeking a wife from his own people. He sought to humour his father by taking a wife who was related to him, but he chose a daughter of Ishmael, who was not in the line of promise through Abraham, and who had married an Egyptian (Gen. 21: 21).

7. (**Liverpool**): Not so - although flight from Esau was involved, Jacob was specifically charged to take a wife from Laban's family (28: 1-2). Esau, too, recognized that Jacob had been blessed and sent away to take a wife (v. 6).

8. (**Liverpool**): We must bear in mind that their culture was completely different from ours. Women had little say as to whom they married, and did not take any leading role. At least Jacob had gone to a family who worshipped the Lord to look for a wife.

P. L. H.

9. (**Derby**): Abraham deviated from a monogamous relationship when he was persuaded by Sarah, his wife, to take Hagar her handmaiden as a secondary wife (Gen. 16: 3).

10. (**Nottingham**): 2 Cor. 6: 14 condemns the joining together of believers and unbelievers in service. The specific instruction relating to marriage is 1 Cor. 7: 39 to which you rightly refer.

J. K. D. J.

11. (**Birkenhead**): Provision for a man to have more than one wife was also made in the Law (Deut. 25: 5). Although such practices were never God's intention in the beginning, they have been used to further His purposes as in the matter of maintaining an inheritance in Israel. It took no less a person than the Lord Himself and His teaching, of a spiritual people and of the relationship between Himself and His Church, to eradicate such a practice from the people of God. By so doing the Lord's people testify of the divine ideal to the world. Against such a background the marriages of the patriarchs cannot be regarded as wicked or sinful.

12. (**Brantford**): Friends in Cowdenbeath have got to the heart of the matter of the significance of the differences between each of the courtships and marriages of the patriarchs. It is not that they are meant to contrast with each other as to what is right and what is wrong. It is simply that they show various facets of the outworking of love in the hearts of disciples as well as in their various foreshadowings of Christ and the Church. The servant (Gen. 24) was about the doing of his Lord's business as swiftly as possible, as servants are supposed to do. Jacob, on the other hand had been told by the Lord that He would be with him till "I have done that which I have spoken to thee of". Far from limiting God by a lack of faith, Jacob walked close to the Lord during his sojourn at Paddan-aram. We cannot fail to notice how quickly Jacob found Rachel after his experience at Bethel. Here is the comparison with the speed by which Abraham's servant accomplished his task. On the other hand we cannot fail to compare how Jacob found Rachel having left Bethel at God's command with how he lost her when he left Bethel after he had been told to dwell there (Gen. 35: 1, 15-20).

13. (**Brantford**): This appears to be retrospective match-making. Like present day match-making we need to be certain that before we engage in it we exceed in wisdom the one who said that the way of a man with a maid was too wonderful for him (Prov. 30: 19). Friends in Cowdenbeath pin-point the Lord's assessment of the match when they cite scriptures which show that Rachel is always given the prior place as regards Leah.

14₀ (**Brantford**): It is difficult to prove favouritism in these cases. We are not told that Jacob was preferred to Esau by his mother or that Isaac preferred Esau above Jacob. We are simply told the reason why each parent loved a particular son. The reasons emphasize the point that the one was influenced by the things of the world and the other was not. In other words the reasons have to do with distinguishing natural from spiritual. Similarly we are not told that Laban favoured Leah. His defence was that he followed the custom of the land. We might also suspect that he simply wanted more cheap labour. As far as Joseph was concerned, Jacob did not show favouritism in the sense of making a capricious choice of Rachel's son. Jacob learned quickly what Potiphar was to learn, what the Egyptian gaoler was to learn, and what no less a person than Pharaoh was to learn, namely that Joseph was a born ruler. Whatever he administered prospered. Therefore Israel and not Jacob was quick to give him a charge in the family business (Gen. 37: 3, 13). See Young Men's Corner Vol. 11, 1930, p. 103.

15. (Liverpool): It is saying too much by implying that Jacob had made a mess of his life. He was very close to the Lord in those days at Paddan-aram and was cruelly deceived by Laban and also by Leah although it may be that she had little choice in the matter. Nevertheless he made the best of it and overcame his difficulties with the Lord's help. To expect him to have loved Leah as he loved Rachel is to expect what is beyond the power of man to do. It may be that in her situation, Leah may depict many wives who feel unloved by their husbands. In her case, however, she found succour in the Lord and we can be sure the result of that will be the blessing of God for her and those who follow her example.

I. E. P.

POSTSCRIPT

The title of this month's subject is taken from Proverbs 18: 22 "whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord". The Scriptures before us contain a wealth of simple, practical instruction in this matter. They are especially relevant to those who have known the blessing of a Christian upbringing and have come to know the Lord in early years. In most, though not all such cases, the young disciple, as he or she sets out Jacob-like to make his or her own way in the world, will marry.

Jacob's parents did not tell him whom to marry; they instructed him as to his future partner's origin and outlook. It is often so with the young disciple of today. Having received, perhaps through parents or through older persons, or by search of the Scriptures, such instruction of a

general nature with **much emphasis** on principle, the young disciple **has** in most cases to **make his or her** own decision in the **fear** of the Lord.

Before Jacob found **Rachel**, he **had** a dealing with God concerning the house of God. **Being assured he was in** the will of God **he** proceeded on **his way** (**Gen. 28: 20**). The importance of the house of God cannot be too strongly emphasized. The Lord **said "seek ye first the kingdom of God... and all these things will be added unto you"** (**Luke 12: 31 RVM**). A young believer of the **kind we are** considering ought not to proceed down the road that leads to **marriage** without first **being assured** of the truth of God's dwelling-place on earth **and** its claims upon **him or her** (**I Cor. 7: 39**).

Following **his experience** at Bethel, Jacob **was** led almost immediately to the chosen woman. His heart responded almost **as quickly**. His **subsequent** behaviour is one of **the great** love-stories of the **Bible**. Any doubt **that** the love **in his heart had been** put there **by the Lord may be dispelled** by comparing **his actions with the characteristics** of love described in **1 Cor. 13**. Young **disciples may** also know a **similar experience** though others **may experience** a more **gradual** development of love **and, it maybe that** for some, **circumstances may be such that marriage may take place** before love **manifests itself**. The importance of love cannot be over-estimated. Through **it the young disciple may be assured** of **the Lord's will in the matter**.

It is sometimes **said that** Jacob should **have chosen Leah because, it is said, she proved to be of greater spiritual stature**. Leaving **aside the** question of **whether Leah's spiritual worth developed as a result of her rejection by Jacob and leaving aside also her portion in the deception** (though **she may have had little choice in the matter**), **the fact is that he loved Rachel**. Choice **in such things is not like** selecting the person who "scores" highest **in spiritual achievement**. It **may be that love is put in hearts by the Lord in order that a partner of lesser stature may gain by the match**.

If as in Jacob's case, love manifests itself at a very early stage, then the young believer can scarcely do better than imitate Jacob by waiting and testing the strength of that love. During that period, Jacob served for a wife. So it is that a young man is expected to lay the foundations for the future financial support that he is expected to give his wife.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, in his serving for a wife Jacob provides a picture of the hardship and service of the Lord Jesus Christ in finding His Bride. So it is that the Scriptures teach that the relationship between a believer and his wife should be a picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church (Eph. 5: 29).

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Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8305

Jacob was worth his weight in gold to Laban. Before Jacob took up his employment Laban's business was small and his younger daughter kept the sheep (Gen. 30: 30, 29: 9). Jacob had begun by lending a ready hand in the watering of the small flock, being motivated by his feelings towards Rachel. He continued to work in that vein so that as the years went by, Laban's flock, and therefore his wealth, increased enormously.

As Laban grew richer and richer through the labours of his faithful servant he had no thought that the labourer might be worthy of his hire. Instead he returned loyal service with deceit and had no scruples about "doing Jacob down" when the time came to recompense Jacob. Laban's word was worthless and like many a man grown wealthy through the efforts of others he squandered what he had (Gen. 31: 15). Given such a character it is hardly to be wondered at that his business failed to prosper before the arrival of Jacob.

The contrast between Jacob and Laban recalls the distinction made by Solomon between the wise and the foolish. Thus of Laban it might be said, "treasures of wickedness profit nothing", but of Jacob "the hand of the diligent maketh rich". Again of Laban it might be said, "he becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand", and of Jacob "The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish" (Prov. 10: 2-4). Herein lay the secret of Jacob's success. He worked to the best of his ability with the best of motives, pursuing a righteous course unflinchingly and uncomplainingly and God worked for him. Even Laban had recognised this (Gen. 30: 27) and so honoured God through the testimony of Jacob.

Jacob's reward for his service lay first of all in his wives and children and then in the flock (Gen. 30: 26, 31: 41). But all of these came to him not simply as a result of his own efforts, but also as a result of the Lord's goodness (Prov. 18: 22, Psa. 127: 3). Something of this principle is seen in the teaching of Ex. 21: 2-6 although, of course, we do not suggest that there was any way in which Jacob could be permanently

employed by Laban. Many contributors have pointed out that the believer today is to work for his earthly employer as Jacob worked for Laban and that in so doing the believer is working for his Lord in heaven. From Him will come a true recompense in the day of reward (Col. 3: 24). But the believer who has been blessed with wife and family should see in them, too, a present recompense from the Lord and so be the more encouraged in his service for God.

But contributors also point out that Jacob's service foreshadows that of the One of whom we sometimes sing:

"Mark the earnest workman toiling,
Faithful to His task and true,
Deeming naught of labour soiling
That His kingly hands would do".

For the greater part of the Lord's earthly sojourn He, too, worked by the sweat of His brow as He entered into the earthly lives of His fellow-men. The day came when He left that work for His greater work. Here He found a state of affairs far worse than the state of Laban's business that was found by Jacob. For man's spiritual estate had fallen into such a state of decay that he was incapable of setting it to rights by himself. Man's nature had become so warped by sin that he was incapable of progressing by any act of righteousness. The Lord showed what life should have been like by being the "Pattern Servant, doing all God's will below". He did more than that, however, by His perfect work on the Cross at Calvary. He became obedient unto death even the death of the Cross that through the obedience of the One the many might be made righteous (Phil. 2: 8, Rom. 5: 19).

LE. P.

CORRESPONDENCE

In Bible Studies 8303, page 52, the problem posed by the use of the divine title "Jehovah" (LORD) in Gen. 28: 13, 16 in the light of the statement made in Ex. 6: 2, 3 was raised by our friends in Cowdenbeath. The question and the response from editors to it was read with interest by brother H. King, Kirkintilloch, and he has sent on the following helpful contribution which we publish for the benefit of all our readers.

We must not conclude that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not know the divine name "Jehovah", for they both knew it and used it.

What the Lord is saying to Moses in Ex. 6 is simply this; that on three occasions when He made a promise concerning the land of Canaan, firstly to Abraham (Gen. 17: 1-8), then through Isaac (Gen. 28: 3, 4), and then to Jacob (Gen. 35: 11, 12) He introduced His title *El Shaddai*, (God Almighty). God is the all-sufficient One who is able to promise great things. It would have been premature to have introduced Himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as *Jehovah* when He was *giving* the promise to them, but it was appropriate to use His name, *Jehovah*, to Moses in Ex. 6 when it was the time to *fulfil* the promise, for *Jehovah* is the faithful, covenant keeping God. In Ex 6: 3 the word "known"¹¹ should be viewed as "made known", for His name is the preface to what He says.

H. King

THE TIMES OF THE PATRIARCHS

EGYPT (Continued from B. S. 8303 page 36)

About 1756 BC a change took place in Egypt. A new line of kings arose called the Hyksos, i. e. "the chiefs of foreign lands". Their arrival was sudden and sensational. They came from Canaan and Syria and had no pity or mercy. They formed an overwhelming, wave which submerged the existing establishment. The temples of the gods were destroyed and cities burned. Wives and children were carried to slavery. The invading forces first gained control of lower Egypt but, later, extended their grip over the land and ruled from Ithet - Tawy. At first they were content to use the administration of the earlier kings but, later, they appointed their own officials to high administrative office. Such was the Egypt of Jacob's old age to which he went at the age of 130 years.

Thus, running parallel with the times of the Patriarchs the events outlined were being used by God to achieve the divine purpose. An earthly nation had been allowed to grow to a place of power and achievement. The way had been opened for the experiences of Joseph and was being prepared for the enslavement of the children of Israel and for the preparation of Moses as their God sent emancipator.

MESOPOTAMIA

A line drawn on a map from Egypt through Palestine and Syria and then along by the course of the Tigris and the Euphrates to the Persian Gulf would pass through Mesopotamia and form the shape of a crescent, usually called the "fertile crescent".

Mesopotamia means "between the rivers" and has been called the "cradle of civilisation". It was in the land contained between the two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, that urban civilisation was developing at the same time as the events already described were taking place in Egypt.

The northern part of the area between these two great rivers was called Akkad and the southern part Sumer, that is the "plain in the land of Shinar" of Genesis. 11: 2. It was in this southern part of modern Iraq that one of the earliest civilisations grew well before the time of Abraham.

The two rivers were subject to serious flooding in the spring, hence the expression ". . . . the other side of the flood. . . ." (A. V.) or "beyond the River" (R. V.) (Josh. 24: 2, 3), but, before the time of Abraham, the Sumerians had drained some of the marshes round the river mouth. Villages of mud huts had grown up on the banks of the Euphrates, the course of which was different from what it is today.

Although the people were probably not pioneers in the development of agriculture they soon adopted various techniques and became more advanced than the people in the northern part. They learned to use irrigation schemes, grew barley and wheat in the rich fertile soil and reared sheep and goats. The plough had been invented and they had seed drills which worked on a similar principle to that used in agricultural machinery of recent times. One reason why this area developed more rapidly than the northern section is thought to have been the availability of various extra food stuffs such as wildfowl, fish and the date palm which was particularly useful for supplementing the diet when the cereal crops were running low at the end of the season. Food resources helped to lead to population increases and also brought about specialisation in labour. Provision was made for food storage and distribution and, of considerable importance, writing was developed thus enabling records to be kept in what was becoming an increasingly complex society.

As some of the people farmed land which was more productive than that of their neighbours a form of class distinction developed, some becoming rich and others relatively poor. The poorer ones were forced to sell their land to the richer and so these people began to sink to what almost amounted to serfdom.

The Sumerians studied and developed the art of warfare achieving a high standard of military discipline. In turn this, with agriculture, widened the range of tools, implements and weapons

required and so the skill of **the** craftsmen developed accordingly.

It was **during this** period **that the** city-states or city-kingdoms progressed, **each with** its own **king and each** fortified against its neighbours. **Such places** were **Ur, Erech, Lagash, Kish and Nippur.** Historians **believe these city-states reached their peak between 2800-2400 B C.** **The kings, seeking supremacy, went to war with one** another frequently **and this resulted in a** concentration of **the** population **within the** fortified cities. Strong fortified **walls were** built round **these urban centres and the rich** landowners moved **in to benefit** from **the** protection **such defences gave.** **The poorer people, the peasants, remained** outside to work **the fields, but the** protection of the **cities was** sometimes extended to companies of people outside. The Sumerians **were an** inventive people **and it is** thought that they **were the** first to use the wheel. **Sheep rearing** continued, **textiles were made and** **merchants plied** regularly along **the** recognized trade routes.

The continual **warfare** between city-states **had a** weakening effect on the whole **area and there were** pressures also from without. About **2400 B. C.** a Semitic people attacked the **land and seized** power. **Their leader** was **king** Sargon who built a capital at **Agade and** created **the Akkadian** dynasty **which has been described as "the world's first true empire".** Sargon's **rule** extended over **Sumer, all** Mesopotamia **and, it is** thought, **extended at times as far as** the Mediterranean. **The Akkadians** adopted **Sumerian** culture **and their rule** lasted about **200 years.**

This short lived empire, powerful as it **was at** the time, shows how ancient history, like all history, demonstrates the fluidity of the international situation. State **rises** against state, nation against nation. Some empires last a long **time,** others **are** of short duration, **and one is reminded** of **Psalm 90.** **Pressures** both internal **and** external proved too strong for the **Akkadian empire and** it disintegrated. **This** allowed the **Sumerians** to return to prominence **and their culture was revived under** the **leadership** of the **rulers of Ur, in which an impressive** programme of **building was** started. However, this was not a **revival** of the old city-states but more **an** introduction of **imperialism** with the greater part of Mesopotamia being directed from Ur. **This period is known as the** third dynasty of Ur.

(To be continued)

R. Hickling

SERVICE AND ITS REWARDS

From Birkenhead: Jacob's life of service, which was lived as a servant to Laban, must be viewed with God's promise to care for him, being ever present in his mind and heart. Jacob undertook his duties for a hard master, and did those things demanded of him with a graciousness which would not have come to him naturally. That aspect of his service reflects his faith in the promise of God, and is the parallel to those characteristics which are encouraged by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians (6: 5-7) and the Colossians (3: 22). We considered his good and faithful service and concluded that having undertaken it in the right spirit, it did not prove unbearably irksome. Indeed, the first seven years seemed but a short time, as revealed in the narrative.

The Lord undoubtedly had a purpose in the affairs which surrounded Jacob. In his marriages and children the Lord was true to His promise and, with this in mind, we were reminded of the birth, life and influence of Joseph, who was born of Rachel. Jacob must have felt the hand of the Lord in his life when he saw that his choice of wife, Rachel, was unable at first to bear children, and yet the promise of the Lord, with regard to his seed being as the dust of the earth, was fulfilled.

Jacob undertook his service in difficult circumstances in the area in which he had been directed by God. He served fourteen years specifically for the reward of the wife he loved and, in recognition of his obedience to God's will, he was further rewarded with material possessions. This, however, would bring its responsibilities, since these things were given to Jacob as a steward of the Lord, and we considered the added responsibility which is laid upon those whom the Lord blesses with material rewards.

In applying the lesson to the life of today's disciples we remembered that Paul exhorted Timothy, likening service to Christ to the life and service of a soldier, who should be constantly engaged in the struggle for the Master.

Finally, we were encouraged by the fact that God overrules today in the lives of believers, and can bring blessings out of wrong choices and flaws in character.

R. C. Halpin, G. H. Roberts

From Brantford: The marvellous attitude which Jacob bore during his twenty years of service to Laban is perhaps best reflected in

the reference of Gen. 29: 20, where seven years seemed unto him but a few days. Despite the continual deceit and harassment from his conniving uncle, Jacob remained upright and true. By honouring his commitments and maintaining his integrity Jacob was blessed by God with many offspring, and given riches in the form of flocks and servants. What a lesson for us who engage in service for God: if we are full of zeal and enthusiasm time will pass rapidly and the job will be pleasurable.

The righteous sense of dedication that Jacob applied to his service was sensed by Laban who could not help but have been impressed with Jacob's diligence in performing his contractual obligations. Even though Jacob was obviously aware of Laban's deceit Laban must surely also have felt a reluctant admiration, for he sensed that Jacob's very presence resulted in increased blessing to himself (Gen. 30: 27). Consequently he was anxious for Jacob to tarry in Haran so that his wealth might further increase.

Although Jacob found himself surrounded by people of a strange nation for twenty years he was able to maintain a separate identity among Laban's people. He acknowledged certain goals, such as the procurement of a wife, and he expressed the natural desire to amass material goods and substance; but he never stopped his communion with God, nor did he lose sight of the goal. He desired to return to his own country (30: 25) for he was aware that Haran was a foreign place to those who belong to God. In a practical sense so also must the Christian remember in his contact with others who he is, where he belongs and whom he represents. We, as Christians, should, as Jacob did, make our presence felt so that others are blessed by our righteous behaviour and dedication. While Colossians 3 exhorts us to "work heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men" we also should remember that others are constantly observing our actions and it is important that our testimony be unswerving and our words and deeds in absolute harmony.

Jacob, in all his years of service, honoured God despite adversity and persecution. As a result he was blessed abundantly and made the father of a great nation. [Comment 7].

We, as Christians today, certainly have a less spectacular role to play in God's plan than Jacob had. However, there is much service that we can render to God and we should take lessons from this mighty patriarch. The rewards for service are great and should spur us on to greater efforts for our Master and Lord.

W. Douglas

From Cowdenbeath: Love's labour is always light. Jacob contracted **with Laban to serve seven years for Rachel and undoubtedly "he looked unto the recompense of reward"**. Love can make the rough smooth **and the weary waiting time short**. It may make us oblivious to things **which, for the lack of it, would be unsupportable**. **Such it proved to be in Jacob's case**. Jacob served fourteen years as a dowry. Laban **had deceived him being fully aware of the terms of the bargain (Gen. 29: 18-20)**. He gave Leah to Jacob **first of all: then Rachel on "credit terms"**.

The faithfulness of Jacob's **service is evident in that**, despite Laban's deception, **he continued in service during** the second period of **seven years**. Less honest **men might have stolen away in the night embittered by these events**. **Indeed**, throughout the entire twenty years **his faithfulness is described by the exclamation, "ye know that with all my power I have served...."** (Gen. 31: 6).

After twenty years and in flight Jacob gave vent to his feelings. He **did not do so while in service**. He catalogued before **Laban the pain, sorrow and disappointment suffered in return for which Laban's wealth had increased (31: 38-41)**. Laban **knew it (30: 27)**. God was **watching over the scene**. Jacob's **true reward came from above**. God **had blessed the union with Leah in giving him children**. God **blessed his period of service among the flock (30: 43) and the man increased exceedingly**. Jacob recognised **these events as the hand of God (31: 9)**: so also **did Rachel and Leah (v. 16)**, **but the sons of Laban did not (v. 1)**. Jacob contrasted **the grace of God with the meanness of Laban, "and your father....but God"** (Gen. 31: 7).

The fact that God blessed Jacob so richly, despite his unscrupulous determination to gain advantage by tampering with the usual course of nature, thereby catching the opportunity of making an independent provision for his large and increasing family out of Laban's desire to retain him, magnifies the grace of God [Comment 1].

R. I. Shaw

From Derby: **This part of Jacob's life marks an important stage in his development**. He **had lived a sheltered life in his father's encampment**. When **he passed out to enter into bondservice he lost that protection**. He **had then to learn the discipline of service and had no freedom of choice**. **This is an important stage for us all**. We **have been called to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and we can serve no-one better**. He **will never fail us and we should learn what it is to be in subjection to Him**. He says, "Take my yoke upon you". We

should place ourselves **gladly and lovingly under the authority of the Lord. In secular service we ultimately serve the Lord.**

Jacob was diligent in his service. He did not spare himself, and Paul urged Timothy to be diligent. In his service and his diligence Jacob had to learn patience. This was well tested during the twenty years he spent with Laban. Paul prayed for the Colossians that they might be "strengthened. . . unto all patience and longsuffering with joy". In our development one of the great lessons is patience. We have been given the power of the Holy Spirit of God which will give us true success in this.

Jacob suffered a lot. He endured the frost by night and the drought by day. Suffering of some sort may be involved if we are going to serve the Lord.

It was love that gave Jacob the strength for all that he did. He loved Rachel so much that the seven years seemed like seven days. Love urged him and encouraged him. If love is lacking in our service for the Lord it descends into formality. God gives strong encouragement to serve for rewards. He says, "I come quickly; and my reward is with me". For those who do serve the Lord great and staggering rewards are coming.

G. W. Conway

From Galston: ". . . Seven years... seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her". Where love is the motivating force in service to God or man it shortens the time and eases the burden of service. It may even make enjoyable tasks that would otherwise be irksome. By contrast the Egyptians made the children of Israel's lives "bitter with hard service" (Ex. 1: 13-14). We doubt not that for them the time was long. Then in Malachi's day some said of the service of God, "What a weariness is it!" (Mai. 1: 13) and we hear again God's servant say, "If.. I have not love, it profiteth me nothing" (1 Cor. 13: 3).

Isaiah depicted the Lord Jesus as the Man of Sorrows and for Him and as such the days and weeks would be long. How interminably long they would be when He was bearing our sins on the Cross, although in the perspective of eternity it was but a small moment. Yet He could also say, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me. . . ." and through the prophet, "I delight to do Thy will, O My God!" (Ps. 40: 8). We judge, therefore, that for Him as such a Man the time was also short. This is a great mystery.

Genesis **30: 25** indicates that Jacob was now aged about **91** and had **11** sons and **1** daughter. Presumably he had also some small herd and flock of his own since he was contemplating the long journey back to **Canaan**. These were the rewards of years of service to **Laban**. Laban had been enriched by Jacob's service. He confessed, "I have divined that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake" (Gen 30: 27) and when Jacob said, "It was little which thou hadst before I came, and it has increased unto a multitude___", Laban tacitly agreed and asked, "What shall I give thee?" (Gen. 30: 30-31).

Men are benefitted by the service and presence of disciples of the Lord Jesus. This is true of the employers for whom they work and the neighbours among whom they live. "Work heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that from the Lord ye shall receive the recompense of the inheritance" (Col. 3: 23), and "having your behaviour seemly among the Gentiles; that.... they may by your good works, which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Pet. 2: 12).

Laban broke his word (Gen. 30: 32, 34, 35). To counter Laban's double-dealing Jacob put to profitable use his knowledge of animal genetics, but in his account to his wives of how he had "increased exceedingly" did he sincerely ascribe all to God or did he (as we suspect) cleverly conceal his own part in order to secure the undivided loyalty of his wives? [Comment 2].

It may be that at the end of the six years Laban's flocks and herds had decreased (Gen 31: 15) which reminds us of the warning of Pharaoh Neco (2 Chron. 35: 21) "... God hath commanded me.. ... forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me....", and of the wise words of Gamaliel (Acts 5: 38), "Refrain from these men ... if this counsel or this work be of men, it will be overthrown: but if it is of God, ye will not be able. ... lest haply ye be found even to be fighting against God".

Laban's sons' talk and Laban's unfriendly looks make Jacob sense imminent danger at which point God intervened and instructed him in the way he should go. Above all He said, "I will be with thee" (Gen. 31: 3). To the heart of each of us He speaks even more comfortably, "I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee" (Heb. 13: 5).

J. H. Johnson

From Liverpool: *Learning from Life*. Jacob had a lot to put up with from Laban. To be fair to Jacob he showed considerable patience. The experiences no doubt taught him a deeper, sounder trust in his God, as well as steadfastness, and how to take the humbler part. We wondered if we all need a Laban in our lives: someone to force us to learn to be forgiving and not to give up despite their awkwardness.

Facing up to Responsibility. Jacob's weak position over Rachel strengthened with the negotiated terms. Jacob was aware of God's blessing through him; Laban was also aware of it. Jacob also had a growing awareness of his responsibilities. He wanted to care properly for his family; probably thinking about the future, after Laban's death as well. In doing this he was really only claiming his rights..

"Shady" Business. Was the business with the goats a "dirty trick" by Jacob or a reaction to Laban sending the mottled goats away? It is difficult to say. Laban's daughters were certainly on their husband's side. We agreed that more is expected of us as followers of Jesus than this "get my own back" attitude. There are indeed many puzzles in this story! [Comment 3]

Superstition and Blessing. Jacob's attempted manipulation of the flock by use of the rods in the breeding season would appear to be based on a superstition: are we to assume that God went along with this? Certainly his success owes more to divine intervention than to selective breeding! [Comment 4]. The trials and tribulations of polygamy, such as rivalry and jealousy, are obvious enough - but despite all the "goings on" God honoured each son born as the patriarch of a tribe. Indeed the Lord came from the tribe of Judah, the son of Leah, but Joseph, a great Old Testament picture of Christ was the son of Jacob's favourite wife. The passage most strikingly displays the great and unmerited goodness of God and the shortcomings of men and women.

A. G. Davies

From **Methil**: Jacob willingly made a contract with Laban to serve him seven years for Rachel. Jacob served cheerfully because of his great love for Rachel. The time did not seem long; just a few days (Gen. 29: 20). Jacob's love for Rachel motivated him to serve and endure times of drought, nights of frost and all the hardship associated with being a good shepherd. Ultimately he received his reward, his beautiful and well favoured bride. We thought of the Lord Jesus who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross and despised shame (Heb. 12: 2), and now the day of His reward draws near. Such

love **by the Lord Jesus generates** love in our **hearts to serve the One** who loved **us** so unstintingly. Jacob chose Rachel; **we are reminded** that **the Lord Jesus chose us** (John 15: 16).

Jacob **reaped what he sowed** in another **way** too. He **had** deceived his **father and** in **turn** was deceived **by** Laban **when** given **Leah** instead of **Rachel** to wife.

We do not **judge** Jacob for **having** more than one wife **but** took note that **he** did love one more **than** the other **and** this brought troubles in the home **because** of jealousy **and** rivalry. However, God **blessed** the household with **many** sons. From Leah's **son, Judah, came** the line in which the **Lord Jesus was** born.

The **Lord Jesus** is **the Good Shepherd**. Jacob **was** a good **shepherd** and like today's **shepherds** worked faithfully among **the** flock. We **see** God's over-ruling **care** in the **case** of Jacob for, although Laban **changed** his **wages** ten times, God **turned** it to the benefit of Jacob in the **end**. **Just as** Jacob who **served** so faithfully got his **reward**, so God will **reward** for faithful service in **the present day** **and each man** will **have** praise from God according **as** his work is.

A **sad blot** in **Rachel's character** is **seen when she** stole **her father's** household gods **and** so **gave** Laban an **excuse** to **quarrel** with Jacob. Today **we are** taught to **guard** ourselves from idols; both literal **and** metaphorical for no **man can serve** more **than** one **master**.

Jacob, in his life's journey, **knew** God's leading **and** guiding **and** was tremendously **blessed** with a household of sons **and** enormous flocks **and** herds. His proved to **be** a fruitful life. **We as** believing pilgrims today **are blessed** with **every** spiritual blessing in **the** heavenly **places** in Christ **Jesus (Eph. 1: 3)**. **Our** lives too should **be** fruitful.

N. G. Coomer

From Nottingham: During our consideration of **the** events recorded in **Gen. 29: 1-20**, the view **was expressed** that Jacob **may have allowed** the **lust** of his **eyes** to get **the** better of him in **the** choice of **Rachel** as his wife. **Rachel** was "beautiful **and** well favoured" while Leah, described as "tender eyed" was, **apparently, less** attractive. It was suggested, therefore, that Jacob **may have been** in error in choosing **Rachel**. **Her** character seems to **have had many** blemishes; **she** was given to **envy (Gen. 30: 1)** **and**, later, **she** stole **the** idols **and** tricked **her father** during his search for them (**Gen 31: 35**). We **remember** that **when Abraham's servant** went to find a bride for **Isaac he** prayed for definite guidance (**Gen. 24: 11-52**) **and** was led clearly to **Rebekah**,

but we note there is no similar experience recorded in respect of Jacob and Rachel. Others of our number took the view that Jacob was not wrong in taking Rachel and it was in the purposes of God that both she and Leah were to be his wives (cf. Ruth 4: 11) [Comment 5].

Whatever the position regarding this matter we see Jacob receiving a taste of his own actions in that he was deceived by Laban over the matter of his wife and badly treated by him (Gen. 31: 40, 41). The cunning Jacob met a cunning Laban, but, also, Laban found his match in Jacob. In these experiences God was teaching Jacob not to rely on his own devices but rather on the promises of God. We recognise this principle as being of great importance in the believer's pilgrim experience. It is easy for us to work out a solution to a particular problem which may face us in our own strength without seeking and waiting for God to work and we need to remember Proverbs 3: 5, 6.

The first seven years of Jacob's service for Rachel seemed but a few days because of the love he had for her (Gen. 29: 20). This is not said of the second seven years of service and, because of his experiences, it was suggested he may have found this period much more wearisome. In the believer's experience the labours for the Lord must be done out of love for Him. Only service which has this motive will be acceptable and once our love for Him has diminished or gone then the work will be done either as an effort of the flesh, or it will become an unwelcome burden. We are reminded of 1 Cor. 13.

God overruled and used the deceit of Laban to fulfil His purpose in building the house of Israel. We see human failure again in the "panic" action of Rachel in giving her maid servant to Jacob for the purpose of child-bearing and in similar action on the part of Leah prompted, it seems, by jealousy (Gen. 30: 1-5, 9-11). We compared this with Sarah's action over Hagar (Gen. 16: 1-4). Yet God graciously allowed the children of both Rachel's and Leah's handmaids to be counted among the founders of the nation of Israel.

We had discussion over the question as to whether or not it was right for Jacob to have two wives. This is contrary to the divine concept of marriage (Gen. 2). Some thought we should not attempt to apply New Testament standards to the days being considered. Others thought that God overlooked man's failure in having more than one wife, but required this standard to be applied after the giving of the law (cf. Ex. 20: 14) [Comment 6]-

In spite of Laban's caprices as, for example, the changing of Jacob's wages ten times, Jacob's service was of the highest quality and is summarised in Gen. 31: 38-42. Laban realised that he had been blessed by having Jacob in his service and ascribed it to Jacob's God (Gen. 30: 27). What was true of Jacob as Laban's servant should be true of believers in the service of their earthly employers (see Col. 3: 22-25, Titus 2: 9, 10). Such behaviour is good testimony and may result in bringing others to the Lord.

It is interesting to note that God reminded Jacob of his experience at Bethel and the pillar he erected there. God is interested in His house and would have all His servants directed to it.

There is a sharp contrast between the lonely fugitive Jacob (Gen. 28) having nothing, and the wealthy Jacob (Gen. 30: 43, 31: 17, 18). This was the reward of faithful service blessed by God. In the same way, labour in whatever sphere we work in the Lord's service, if done with a right motive, will be rewarded (see 1 Cor. 3: 6-8 and compare Heb. 11: 26). The emphasis is on faithful service in Matt. 25: 21.

Gen. 30: 37-43 is a difficult passage to understand. It seems unlikely that the presence of the rods with the white strakes would have any effect upon the lambs conceived. It was suggested that Jacob's action with the rods was a type of cry to God for help and that God overruled in the matter as supported by verse 9 of Gen 31. Another thought expressed was that the rods merely formed a dividing fence between the lambs of Jacob and those of Laban [Comment 4].

R. Hickling

COMMENTS

1. (Cowdenbeath): Laban was prepared to give Jacob anything he asked, but Jacob would not take anything other than what he had worked for by his own efforts (Gen. 30: 28, 31). He took the breeding process as far as he could and left the Lord to finish it off. At the end of the day, as friends in Cowdenbeath point out elsewhere, it was the Lord who determined the number of each new generation of the flock which would fall to Jacob (Gen. 31: 9-12). Were it not then Jacob would indeed be guilty of behaviour little better than that of Laban. The believer today should make sure that he is getting the best arrangement that he can from his employer, but should make sure that the Lord has His say in the matter.

2. (Galston): If the sight of the sticks determined the kind of sheep that were to be born then there would have been no room for the Lord to work to rescue Jacob from the deceit of Laban. Indeed, if all depended on the efforts of the shepherd then Laban could equally well have used the same device to ensure that he obtained the numbers and kind of sheep which he wanted during one of his many changes of mind as to Jacob's wages. Thus

Jacob recognised how minor was his part and gave the glory to the Lord who was the final arbiter of who got what.

3. **(Liverpool):** As friends in Liverpool say later, Jacob would not have prospered had the Lord not intervened. Far from Jacob "getting his own back"¹¹, it was the Lord who stopped Laban hurting Jacob (Gen. 31: 7, 12).

4. **(Liverpool):** The significance of the rods is difficult to determine (see Nottingham's paper), but it is clear that what happened involved divine intervention. Jacob did the best he could and trusted the Lord to do the rest. Jacob did his work then the Lord did His. God will not do for us what He expects us to do ourselves. On the other hand, we should not attempt to do what only God can do. It may be that the incident with the rods is rather like the command not to muzzle the ox. It may be that this incident is for our benefit as much as for Jacob's. Today shepherds should place before the sheep, when they come to feed, the image into which they would like the sheep to be transformed. At any rate, when our knowledge is uncertain we should not charge a man like Jacob with superstition.

I. E. P.

Superficially it appears from the narrative, that Jacob believed that the colour of the new-born lambs would be affected by what the ewes saw. If so he was mistaken, but it is a little hard to call him superstitious, for many centuries were to pass before the mechanism of heredity was discovered, and arguments have raged in recent times about the influence of environment upon inherited characteristics. As several groups have pointed out, it was God who worked for Jacob in this case (31: 8-12).

P. L. H.

5. (Nottingham): See last month's issue. In later Scriptures, such as the one friends in Nottingham cite, Rachel, the younger, is given precedence over Leah by the Holy Spirit.

I. E. P

6. (Nottingham): This is plainly not so, because the Law also provides for the situation where a man has more than one wife (Deut. 21: 15). Adultery consists of sexual relations with a person to whom one is not married: David, for instance, legitimately (for those days) had more than one wife, but he committed adultery with Bathsheba.

P. L. H

See last month's issue. God's purpose in inheritance amongst the people of God permitted a man to have more than one wife (Deut. 25: 5-10).

I. E. P.

7. **(Brantford):** Jacob was blessed because of his attitude to God, but his being made the father of a great nation was not the result of any actions of his: it was the result of the sovereign choice of God (Rom. 9: 11-13).

P. L. H.

POSTSCRIPT

The Scriptures before us this month bring us to yet another stage in Jacob's experience that is similar to that likely to be experienced by the believer in his earthly pilgrimage today. As said last month, it is essential that the young believer, like Jacob before him or her, should have a clear understanding and belief in the importance of the truth of the house of God before he or she sets out to make his or her way in the world. In most cases he or she will marry a wife or husband whom he or she hopes will be a life-long fellow-pilgrim. Again, in the case of most men, the believer will have to work for an earthly master during which time he will also be charged with bringing up children in the fear of the Lord.

The importance of the way in which he works for his earthly master cannot be over estimated. It is the field in which most of his waking hours will be spent. In most cases he will spend more hours in his workplace than at meetings, or at prayer, or in reading the Scriptures. He will be blessed indeed if he finds a good employer but may, perhaps, as Jacob did, find himself working for a bad employer. He may take courage from Jacob's pilgrimage. No matter how badly Jacob was treated, the Lord took notice and saved him from hurt. The believer in the house of God may expect a similar care from the One who promised to be with His disciples always (Matt. 28: 20).

The excellence of Jacob's service was not lost upon Laban. Ever he was led to attribute Jacob's success to the Lord. The believer's daily work, too, should be beyond reproach. It might not lead his earthly master to an acknowledgment of the believer's Lord, but it is certain that work badly done will destroy the believer's testimony.

Reference has already been made in this issue to the way in which Jacob's service foreshadows that of the Lord both as to His work as a carpenter and as to His greater work in restoring men to God. Unlike Jacob, the believers today are privileged to serve God by directly participating in labour of a spiritual nature as bearers of God's message of salvation in His Son. Search of the New Testament scriptures, however, will show that in this service the believer is to be joined with others in the work (e. g. John 4: 38, 1 Cor. 3: 9, 15: 58, 16: 10). It is here that the importance of early appreciation of the significance of the house of God may be seen. Today the house of God is the place of collective testimony. Workers are to be fellow-workers fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God (Col. 4: 11). *I E P*

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Bible Studies

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EDITORIAL

8306

The Lord Jesus said, "But I say unto you which hear.... of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again" (Luke 6: 30). When Laban said to Jacob, "What shall I give thee?", Jacob said, "Thou shalt not give me aught" (Gen 30: 31). God had seen Jacob's affliction and the labour of his hands (31: 42) and had given him that which Laban had taken away. (31: 9).

Jacob now had a clear instruction from God to return to the land of his fathers, the land of his nativity. He was supported in his faith by Rachel and Leah when they said, "Whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do" (31: 16) .;

He aimed to provide for his own house (30: 30) and was conscious of his responsibility to his sons not to leave them in the service of another outside God's chosen land. Esau may have been in Laban's mind when he said, "The God of your father spake to me", for he did not simply say, "The God of thy father" (31: 29). Laban was seeking to assert that his own restraint was in no way attributable to any achievement of Jacob himself. But Jacob's sons were listening to that word, "The God of *your* father". The gracious purpose of God looked also to succeeding generations, as we find Ezra in his day seeking a straight way "for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance" (Ezra 8: 21).

So too Isaiah had the vision of the outcasts of Israel being assembled yet again from beyond the River (Isa. 11: 12).

God's word to us is, "Fear not their fear, neither be troubled" (1 Pet. 3: 14). Like Joseph we may yet come to know what it is to suffer for righteousness' sake, and may be anxious, but our heavenly Father knows what we have need of. Our Lord Himself said, "Seek ye His kingdom, and these things shall be added unto you (Luke 12: 31).

E. A.

THE TIMES OF THE PATRIARCHS (Continued from B. S. 8305 page 73)

This city had now become a place of considerable importance and developed accordingly. The place was dominated by the great ziggurat of Ur, dedicated to the moon god Nannar although there were other deities, the king himself being regarded as a god, a practice which had arisen in the times of the Akkadian empire. It was a time of great prosperity and thousands of tablets, unearthed by archaeologists testify to considerable commercial activity. There were literary works of all types; mathematics, astronomy and other subjects were studied to an advanced degree. Measures, weights and a uniform calendar had been developed. Writing enabled records to be kept and one of the earliest known law codes, if not the earliest, dates from these days of the glory of Ur. A detailed account of the city appears on pages 135 - 138 of Bible Studies for 1969.

In spite of its glory and power the third dynasty of Ur lasted little more than a century. The rivalries between the city-states which had been subdued for some time flared up yet again weakening Ur's position and leaving it open to a devastating invasion by the Elamites. The city was almost totally destroyed and its last ruler, Ibbi-Sin, was taken captive to Susa. A Sumerian poem describing the catastrophe contains the words:

"My city on its foundations verily was destroyed;
Ur where it lay verily perishes".

Quite apart from the sacking of Ur by the Elamites its authority had been under pressure for some time by a people believed to be identical with the Amorites of the Old Testament.

In ancient history it is not possible always to be definite about dates. Some scholars give the period of the third dynasty of Ur as 2113 - 2006 BC, others place it a little later at 2060-1950 BC. In the same way chronologists give c. 1900 BC as the time of Abraham. Comparing these dates an interesting question arises about Abraham. We know from Genesis 11 that he lived in Ur, but was he there and did he leave it while it was at the height of its glory? Or was he there when catastrophe overtook the city? We cannot be certain, but we do know from the word of God something which is of great importance to us. It was in Ur that the God of glory appeared to Abraham and, whatever his experience in the city, by faith he¹ looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God". The sight of such a city must have far surpassed anything Abraham had seen on earth.

The encroaching Amorites began to establish dynasties in Mari, Ashur and Babylon, adopting, in the main, the language of the

Akkadians and the existing way of life of the area. Little was known about the kingdom of Mari until, in 1933, almost by accident, certain archaeological discoveries were made. During the years that followed further excavations carried out by the French Professor Parrot unearthed the ruins of the palace of the King of Mari, a magnificent building of some 300 rooms and covering about 15 acres. In its day this must have been one of the wonders of the world and one merchant expressed his excitement at having seen it by the succinct words "I have seen Mari!" Almost 24,000 cuneiform tablets were removed by the archeologists for deciphering. It is possible that Abraham saw some of the glories of this place on his journey to Haran.

R. Hickling

MAN OF SUBSTANCE (Gen. 31: 1-55)

From **Birkenhead**: Jacob had served some twenty years under Laban, and had two wives, large flocks and many possessions. These had come to him as a result of the care of the Lord for him, and as a reward for faithful service. Despite working for Laban, who was a man with a keen business sense who would wish to manipulate events to his own advantage, Jacob was able to acknowledge the Lord, who was the One with higher claim and authority over him. As a result of his being a faithful servant, the Lord richly blessed Jacob. Nevertheless, Jacob appears to have been continually desirous of returning to his own land and his own people, but he was prepared to accept that God had a time prepared for this. When that time came, Jacob received a promise (Gen 31 : 3 "Return . . . and I will be with thee") which does not seem, from subsequent events, to have been continuously prominent in his mind.

While preparing for departure, Jacob had to consider three aspects of the situation - taking his wives from their family, leaving Laban and meeting the unknown. In later decisions it would appear that these constraints drove out from his mind the promise which should have been his major consideration [Comment 5].

Jacob fled in secret and made some progress towards his home before Laban was in a position to confront him. The Lord was, however, continually controlling events and intervened on behalf of Jacob when He restrained Laban. The confrontation took place, and there emerged a concern over the missing gods of Laban, and Scripture reveals that Rachel had been responsible for their removal. We were unable to determine the significance of these gods. Laban valued them, but whether they were removed by Rachel because of her respect for them, or in order to deprive Laban of the "power", was not clear. The

picture was further confused by the reaction of Laban when agreement was reached with Jacob. The God of Jacob is called upon to witness the agreement and again we were unable to determine whether Laban was won over to the true God, or whether he merely believed in a multiplicity of gods [Comment 1].

Throughout the passage we were impressed by the fact that Jacob had been materially blessed by God for his loyal service. With wealth Jacob was given the responsibility of stewardship, but in addition he was given the promise of God to guide him. The final lesson was that despite failure by Jacob, there was no failure on the part of God, who remained faithful throughout.

As we apply this to the pilgrim on today's journey, it is clear that no matter how much or how little of this world's possessions have been bestowed by the Lord, He will not withhold His guiding care.

R. C. Halpin, A. E. Sands

From Brantford: What a difference it makes to a man to have an experience like the one Jacob had at Bethel. As this chapter unfolds we see a faithful man, blessed of God and protected in the midst of enemies, enemies who were full of envy and jealousy for Jacob's prosperity. Jacob discerned that his father-in-law's attitude toward him was not as before, and so he heeded God's instruction to return to the land of his birth immediately. Flight is the best alternative in certain circumstances. Jacob showed, in his hasty departure, that he wanted his family to share the situation with him - another good lesson.

We would like to think that after so many years of knowing Jacob, Rachel would have known to abhor idols. Because of her act in taking the teraphim she almost brought disaster upon herself and her family. Was Jacob too absorbed in making a living or accumulating substance to instruct his wife in the ways of the Lord? Or was it a custom that even he could not overcome? We notice though, later on, that Jacob requested, as they approached Bethel (Gen 35: 2) that all idols be put away. So they were still there even as they approached the land f Comment 11.

Jacob's attitude to Laban is interesting. Here they were in confrontation, the pursuer and the fugitive, in the mountains of Gilead. With the search for the lost idols unsuccessfully completed, Jacob had an opportunity to air his grievances and take the offensive position. He showed remarkable courage here considering his situation. Perhaps the fact of knowing what God had said to Laban turned the situation to his advantage.

It is revealed repeatedly in Scripture and again, certainly in the story of Jacob, that ^MGod shall fulfil every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus^M (Phil. 4: 19). Jacob was truly a man of substance for God supplied all his needs and more. We know that the substance we might have today is entirely due to God's goodness and not as a result of anything we have done. However, Jacob serves as an inspiration, for we know how hard he worked for the substance he accumulated. God blessed him abundantly and the lesson for us is if we "work heartily, as unto the Lord " and honour Him He will bless us as well. In addition, our appreciation for His blessing will be much greater.

Do we not see in the pillar and stones that Laban, though he was a devious man, recognized that God was with Jacob in all that he did? Laban wanted protection for the future for his seed and so provided a line or barrier through Jacob that accomplished this. Potiphar and Pharaoh, of later times, saw that God's hand was with Joseph, Jacob's son. The world does have a certain insight at times and if it is applied rightly it can be of great benefit to those concerned.

Jacob, as we have seen in our discussion of this and previous chapters, is God's man. Honourable, impeccable in his work habits, and unswerving in his faith despite twenty years of living in a pagan culture, he had emerged as a man of substance, forerunner of a great race. Jacob was at last on his way home.

A. Sproul, W. Douglas

From Cowdenbeath: The materialistic view of Laban's sons contrasts sharply with the statement of his daughters. In the former case they said, "Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's" (31: 1); in the latter, "God hath taken away from our father... " (31: 16). In this matter Jacob's wives concurred with his statement in v. 9.

How merciful is our God! He watched over the scene at Paddan-aram. While covetous Laban tried hard to outwit Jacob, the methods he employed were frustrated by the overruling hand of God. His wages had been changed ten times in six years, despite which "Jacob increased exceedingly". "God suffered him not to hurt me" (31: 7). We noticed in passing that, in His mercy, God attributed the multiplication of wealth to Jacob's skill ("the cattle of his getting " v.18).

Jacob's method to explain to his wives the return to Canaan was impressive. He did not first of all advise them of the command of God. Rather he explained the deteriorating attitude of Laban's household against the faithfulness of his own service. His wives were

able to agree on these points and to extend them to themselves. To emphasize the need to depart Jacob then explained God's message (v13).

Undoubtedly, by this time Jacob's family was a substantial one and the wealth which God transferred to Jacob was sure evidence of His full provision.

God had promised Jacob that he would return from Paddan-aram (28: 15) and it seems he was waiting for the call. Does it not sometimes happen that the drift of outward circumstances corroborates God's voice to our hearts? This was Jacob's experience.

We thought there was a sense in which Laban's strong attempts to retain Jacob and his family reflected the attitude of the world to the believer who, trusting Christ, seeks to break free. There was:

- a) active pursuit
- b) chiding and accusation
- c) the bribery of mirth and song
- d) a suggestion of mockery

but, with the help of God, Jacob was strongly against him (v. 36).

Latterly, it seemed that Laban recognised a higher hand in all that had transpired and, in resignation, suggested the raising of a testimony to God's watchful eye. Although, as he departed, he embraced his daughters no similar emotion seems to have passed between the two men.

Jacob swore by "the Fear of Isaac". Twice in chapter 31 he spoke in this way and we thought that such a statement reflected the posture of a God-fearing patriarch still alive at the time the statement was made.

R. I. Shaw

From Derby: It is plainly evident at this time in Jacob's life that he was a man of wealth and of importance in the community. We asked the question, "Can a man be a man of substance and at the same time a pilgrim?" We looked at Abraham who was certainly rich and yet a pilgrim. Paul recognizes that there will be rich pilgrims as he says in 1 Tim. 6: 17-18 that those who are rich in this present world should have their hope set on God and do good. So long as the wealth has been accumulated by legitimate means there is the responsibility to use it wisely. It is the love of money that is condemned. Let us enjoy what God has given us. We shall be accountable to Him in a future day for how we have used our possessions. Although Jacob was a good shepherd all that he had came from God. He realized this

himself and declared it in v. 9. It is God who gives to us. He also gave the power to gain wealth to the Jewish nation.

In v. 13 God wanted the fact that he was the God of Bethel to be firmly implanted in Jacob's mind and He wanted him to realize that Bethel was central in God's purposes for him. David said he had asked of the Lord one thing and that was that he would dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life. If we were to ask of God one thing what would that be?

When the transaction was made between Laban and Jacob an agreement was entered into that he would do right with his wives. In v. 16 they had given Jacob strong encouragement when they said to-him, "Whatever God has said unto thee do".

G. W. Conway

From **Edinburgh:** Although the main event of this chapter is Jacob's exciting escape from Laban, the chapter also describes Jacob's twenty years under Laban and the reasons for his planned exodus. Jacob lived with Laban, four hundred and fifty miles away from his parents.

31: 1-13 Jacob describes God's part in his life

31: 14-16 Rachel and Leah's response

31: 17-21 Jacob leaves Laban

31: 22-30 Laban confronts Jacob

31: 31-43 Jacob confronts Laban

31: 44-55 Covenant between Jacob and Laban

This chapter includes teaching on the characters of Jacob, Laban and God and the Christian life today.

Laban: Laban was consistently deceitful towards Jacob throughout the twenty years and there are plenty of examples - he deceived Jacob over his wife (29: 25), was an unjust employer (31: 38-42), **misused** the dowry that Jacob should have received (31: 14), used cunning after reaching a fair agreement with Jacob about the price of Jacob's freedom (30: 35), gave no inheritance to his daughters (31: 14), and Jacob fully expected to be sent away penniless (31: 42) [Comment 6]. Furthermore, his daughters held him in contempt and his intention to kiss them would have been an unwelcome, hypocritical gesture. The two women were united in their opinion and their previous enmity towards each other was dispelled. Finally, Laban served other gods. It was only God's direct intervention which withheld Laban's punitive anger from Jacob.

God: The chapter includes two striking interventions by God: firstly, in telling Jacob to leave his employer and, secondly, in withholding Laban's anger from Jacob. In recounting his life under Laban, Jacob mentioned the activity of God six times (31: 5-16); he only left Laban when God instructed him to. God used the years under Laban to transform Jacob into a humble, patient and wealthy man. The natural man was subdued and the spiritual man nourished. Perhaps when Laban deceived Jacob, Jacob reflected how he had deceived his father in previous years. Jacob perceived his God as a Person who revealed Himself and cared for His people.

Furthermore, the wealth of Laban had been transferred to Jacob (31: 9) and Jacob perceived this as a blessing from God. God also assigned to the Levites the service of the Tabernacle in place of the first-born in Israel who were disobedient. Here we see how God sometimes works in both judgment and blessing by assigning undeserved wealth to an obedient person or people.

Applications Today

1. *Guidance:* The origins of this chapter go back to the day when Jacob and Rebekah deceived Isaac, and Jacob had to flee his brother's anger. Jacob was then oppressed by Laban; he suffered for his misdeed. However, despite these actions of Jacob, God blessed him and continued to intervene in his life for good. God seemed to bless Jacob despite Jacob's behaviour. Is this observation applicable today? [Comment 3].
2. *Work:* Jacob suffered injustice for twenty years and he did not leave his employer or "go on strike" (See 1 Pet. 2: 18-23).
3. *Family:* The favouritism showed by Rebekah for Jacob was repeated between Jacob and Joseph and had turbulent repercussions among the siblings in both generations [Comment 4].
4. *Man of Substance:* Jacob was a wealthy, free man by the end of the chapter. This cannot be taken literally for the Christian today, but serves as a spiritual metaphor; (see 1 Sam. 2; 30).

P. Merchant

From Galston: Laban's sons became jealous when they observed Jacob's prosperity [Comment 71]. They may have poisoned their father's mind against Jacob, so that Jacob's success became the cause of very strained relations between himself and Laban and the words of God telling Jacob to leave the service of Laban and return to his own country must have been music to his ears.

We felt that Jacob was justified in resorting to the peeled rods to get from the flock what Laban had so nastily denied him. There is no rebuke from God but rather a sympathy with Jacob's actions in that He refers in the dream to the "ringstraked, speckled, and grised" (31: 12), and says, "I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee"¹¹. Certainly God was overruling as Jacob acknowledges in verse 42. We concluded that where we have the means of obtaining blessing then we ought to use these means. We should not expect God to hand everything to us "on a plate"; and this is especially true in spiritual things.

Jacob was no half-hearted man. He worked extremely hard at what he did, exemplifying the scripture, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might" (Eccles. 9: 10). As a result of Jacob's diligence and integrity Laban was silent when Jacob "chode with him" (vv, 36-42) because he knew that every word that Jacob had spoken was the truth. "Seest thou a man diligent in business? . . . He shall not stand before mean men" (Prov. 22: 29). Diligence in spiritual things promises far greater rewards. We recalled the exhortation of Paul to Timothy, "Give thyself wholly to them" (1 Tim. 4: 8-15).

If Laban had not tried to deceive Jacob but had acted in accordance with his own observation, "I have divined that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake" (30: 27), he would have finished up a richer man in every way. God who owns "the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Psalm 50: 10) is the One who distributes material and spiritual wealth as He sees fit. What we possess in the way of material and spiritual substance is given to us by God and can be taken from us if we do not use it properly.

P. J. Johnson, D. Ramage

From Liverpool: *A Sign of God's Approval* - Unlike Naomi, centuries later, Jacob came to a foreign land with nothing, and left a very rich man. In the age in which this story is set the spiritual and material are closely linked and bestowal of wealth seems to signify divine approval and favour. Despite all the emphasis on material things and the hatred and jealousy of family strife and mistrust, God's sovereign will was being carried out.

A Source of Blessing - God had blessed Laban through Jacob. Laban too was prospering, but Jacob proportionately more so. God does not grant blessing, spiritual or material for an individual to keep for himself. It must flow through him to others. Laban was aware of this, although the attitude of his sons would suggest that they were not. In keeping with God's long-term purposes the prosperity

of Jacob was one factor in bringing into existence the nation that God had promised to Abraham and Isaac. In a relatively short time this one man was to become a people of twelve tribes. Significantly with the nation in view here God speaks to Jacob and reminds him of the meeting at Bethel, where the great truth of the house of God is seen in embryonic form. In Jacob God was providing for a people who would be a nation among whom He would dwell. Whenever God blesses us, however, he expects a response from us.

Decision Making - Jacob called a family conference and enjoyed their moral support and fellowship in what he was planning to do. He received the mandate "Whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do" (v. 16). God often guides our lives in this way. Firstly circumstances point to the fact that a move may become necessary and then God's word comes directly to say in which direction the move is to be. The circumstances perhaps made Jacob more ready to listen and obey God's word and similarly God uses circumstances, sometimes unpleasant ones, to make us more ready to obey and do His will.

"Lucky Charms" - We felt that the household gods (v. 19) were probably looked upon as lucky charms as well as possibly possessing some inheritance rights to the person in whose possession they were. Laban was not an idolater as such and recognised Jacob's God as the Lord if not in as full a measure [Comment 1]. Even today it is sadly possible for children of God to serve the Lord and yet put a similar superstitious trust in revered articles. We must guard against this.

A Silent Witness - The two men made a covenant out of mutual mistrust. It was not a territorial agreement but a pact not to harm each other. Significantly Laban called on God as the silent witness who sees when nobody is around [Comment 21. In Gen. 32: 2, after the departure of Laban, Jacob was granted to see some of the divine protection that he had been enjoying unawares. Likewise today God has His angels encamping around those who love and serve Him. This is a great promise for us to understand and believe.

D. J. Webster

COMMENTS

1. (Birkenhead, Brantford, Liverpool): It is surprising that Laban said, "The Lord watch between me and thee"^M, (31: 49) in view of the concern he expressed at the theft of his gods or teraphim. In some respects he was like those of 2 Kings 17: 41 of whom it is recorded, "So these nations feared the Lord, and served their graven images". Jacob had alluded to the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac (31: 42). Laban, however, called not only on the God of Jacob's grandfather to judge between them, but also brought his own grandfather and his worship into it. Jacob swore only by the Fear of his father Isaac (31: 53).

From 1 Sam. 19: 13 it is concluded that the teraphim were a sort of image, and Ezek. 21: 21 shows that they were consulted as a form of divination. Their real value is assessed in Zech. 10: 2, "For the teraphim have spoken vanity".

Leah recognized the personal dealing of the Lord with her at the birth of her sons (29: 32, 33), as also did Rachel (30: 23, 24). Laban himself mentioned the Lord when appealing to Jacob (30: 27), although he also placed emphasis on his own divination in the matter. No distinction is made in the original Hebrew between divination and the use of enchantment, a practice which was later forbidden in the law of the Lord (Lev. 19: 26). Moreover teraphim were capable of being associated with idolatry (1 Sam. 15: 23).

Whether Rachel took the teraphim as being harmless in themselves, or potentially harmful to her father or in the hands of her father, Jacob knew nothing of their presence. Rachel may have failed to rid herself of them in the thought that they might do some good, and no harm would be done if they did not. But she was made to feel how serious an embarrassment and a danger they really were.

When Jacob was told, "Arise, go up to Bethel", he was aware of the presence of strange gods in his household (35: 2). The spoil of Shechem would account for much of this sort, since it included "even all that was in the house" (34: 29). Even although they might regard such objects as powerless, they were to be put away so that their thoughts would be undefiled by any such associations.

2. (Liverpool): As well as seeking lasting immunity from any aggression on Jacob's part, Laban also sought a guarantee for the protection of his daughters.

3. (Edinburgh): If there is blessing it is undoubtedly in the mercy of God, and in spite of all our badness. If Jacob failed many times, God remained faithful throughout all. However, there had to be

positive effort on Jacob's part. In Gen. 35: 3 Jacob prepared to arise and go up to Bethel. He responded to God's speaking, and diligently sought the blessing, as he had done at various stages in his life, though in all the way he had had much to learn.

4. **(Edinburgh):** See Comment 14 in B. S. 8304.

E. A.

5. **(Birkenhead):** Perhaps in later contributions friends in Birkenhead could suggest which decisions were dominated by Jacob's taking his wives from their family, leaving Laban and meeting the unknown.

6. **(Edinburgh):** As Jacob's service wore on he and Laban both realized that the hand of God was with Jacob to bless him despite the efforts of Laban to the contrary. It is therefore most unlikely that Jacob expected to be left penniless especially bearing in mind his earlier dealings with God at Bethel.

7. **(Galston):** Friends in Galston have highlighted a very important point here. Laban's daughters, however, were not as blinded by sin as their brothers and could see that the truth of the matter was that God had blessed Jacob (31: 16).

I. E. P.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. **(Brantford):** To whom or how did Jacob offer his tenth part, as vowed in Gen. 28: 22? That he was blessed is certain, but we do not read if he kept his promise.

The fulfilment of Jacob's vow of Gen. 28: 22 is to be sought in Gen. 35: 7, 14, 15. The pillar anointed with oil of sanctification signified testimony concerning the only true God, and the altar implied offerings, which must come from that which God had first given to him. If we view Jacob's commitment to serve the Lord in the light of Rom. 12: 1 and 1 Cor. 9: 7, the application today is plain.

Scripture does not state explicitly that someone received Jacob's tithe, but the implication is that he would give a tenth of that wherewith he had been prospered to the glory of the Lord.

E. A.

2. **(Galston):** Why did God say to Laban, "Take heed to thyself that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad?"

God had commanded Jacob to return to the land of his nativity (31: 13). Laban was not to attempt whether by offer of kindness or by threats to make Jacob retrace his journey to Paddan -aram. He was not even to make it appear by fair words that Jacob was indebted to him for allowing him to proceed on the way to the land of his fathers. It was the kindness of God which should remain in the mind of the Israelite when he said, "A Syrian ready to perish was my father" (Deut. 26: 5).

E. A.

POSTSCRIPT

The scriptures under consideration this month bring us to that stage in Jacob's experience when he had accumulated sufficient wealth to be financially independent. Instead of being a servant he could be a master. Instead of being a man of little or no account in the eyes of the men who surrounded him at Paddan-aram he was a man of substance. His secret, however, lay in the fact that he was first a man of spiritual substance or worth and therefore could be entrusted with earthly wealth by the Lord.

Such a position of worldly wealth is attained by so few disciples of the Lord (who nevertheless may be men and women of spiritual substance) that, at first sight, the lessons to be drawn from this phase of Jacob's experience may seem to be of limited application. For those few disciples who are so endowed, the lessons are of great benefit. For the remainder the lessons, however, are equally as important in a number of ways. First of all they give the poor an insight into the problems of the disciple who is rich in earthly goods so that sympathetic consideration can be shown and so that the disciple may say with understanding "give me neither poverty nor riches" (Prov. 30: 8). They also show how the poor should behave, or perhaps more accurately, how they should not behave, towards the rich. Again, although few believers may ever attain to such earthly wealth as Jacob had, there can be hardly any one who does not know some one poorer in this world's goods to whom he or she may appear Jacob-like in riches. The matter of the relative nature of riches is particularly brought out in the history of Jacob's pilgrimage because for many believers, later years may bring a greater degree of financial security than that known earlier in the believer's life. Of course, Job's experience shows that there is no guarantee of the permanence of such security. Thus there are numerous, simple lessons of a practical nature to be learned from this episode in Jacob's pilgrimage.

Perhaps the most striking and obvious lesson to be drawn from this part of Jacob's pilgrimage is that there is a complete absence of the kind of illustration or instruction normally associated with that given to the rich. There are no obvious lessons warning of the evil of greed or penny-pinching, or of the dangers of scrooge-like hoarding, or of the evils of lack of generosity. The reason for this may be that Jacob was free from such faults. It is certainly difficult to imagine that a man who worked fourteen years for love in obedience to the Lord's command is the kind of person who has made the attaining of worldly wealth a major goal in his life. In this matter, Jacob who served for love immediately following his dealings with God at Bethel foreshadows the ideal presented by the Lord Jesus: ^MSeek ye His kingdom, and these things shall be added unto you... it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom... make for yourselves purses which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not... for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12: 31-4). A believer who has concentrated for so long, Jacob-like, on giving first place to spiritual things is a person who is unlikely to give way to the gross sins that spring from the love for money.

The scene that is brought before us in the opening verses of chapter 31 is one that has been replayed countless times in communities of all sizes, ranging from families and households, perhaps even to whole nations. Laban's sons were jealous of Jacob's success and put it about that Jacob did not really deserve it, implying that there was something less than honest about Jacob's obtaining of it. The repetition of the words "all that was our father's" implies that at the heart of their murmurings was their belief that they were the rightful heirs to all that Jacob had gained. Something of the gossip-ridden atmosphere of the community at Paddan-aram is conveyed in the way in which Jacob consulted his wives in the field (31: 4), out of ear-shot as it were, of the others. The sight of earthly riches abounding in another often seems to provoke all manner of discontentment often leading to the covetous belief that, because of the disparity in riches, the goods must be ill-gained, perhaps even at the expense of the poorer. While it is true that the world has abounded and doubtless still does with the likes of Ahab or Judas, robbing the poor and spreading like the green-bay tree, the fact is that some are rightfully appointed stewards of great wealth by the Lord. The believer is called upon to exercise discernment and is not to jump to false conclusions, let alone spread untruths about the nature of the rich man's wealth, which really spring from covetousness. Such thoughts, indeed, are the sinner's rationale behind straightforward

theft. Since the Lord in His teaching was especially concerned with the thoughts and intents of the heart, the believer needs to be especially conscious of such motives since he or she in yielding to them may be little better than a thief at heart. It will be seen, then, that a believer endowed with much goods is liable to find himself the target of criticism and even hostility. Were things to get as bad as they were for Jacob at Paddan-aram then it may be that separation of some kind is the best solution. When such a stage has been reached amongst believers in an assembly then it is the very opposite of the harmony that God has created the assembly for.

Laban's change of heart towards Jacob (31: 2) shows that his affected friendship (31: 27) was as false as his wage-rates. He really wanted the goods and the people and the prestige that went with them. When it came to it in the end he could only lay claim to an idol — and a small one at that. Similar motives dogged Jacob's relations with the men of Shechem (34: 23) at a later date. Though couched as friendship rather than hostility such motives are really the same as those of Laban's sons. It is frequently the lot of the rich to be surrounded not so much by murmuring hostility as by false friendship. By "toadying" and parasitic false affection, jackal-like men and women seek to gain for themselves mere carnal largesse. The Lord Himself was keenly aware of those who came to Him for the loaves and fishes and not for the bread from heaven. His disciples, too, in churches of God have not been immune from such behaviour (Jas. 2: 1-10). Thus the rich believer may have difficulty in securing true friendship and the poor may be tempted to ingratiate to the eternal loss of both.

The incident with the teraphim illustrates another difficulty caused by riches. Jacob was unaware of all that was going on in his household and really put his beloved Rachel under sentence of death. A rich man's estate can be so large and its ramifications so extensive that he is unable to know personally all that is happening within it yet he, himself, is ultimately responsible. A similar difficulty arose later in Jacob's experience when his adult sons had charge over his flocks. He had to rely on them and they abused his trust. Not till the young Joseph assumed responsibility did he find out the extent of their deceit (37: 2). It is a very serious matter indeed to think that the believer may be answerable to the Lord for a stewardship which may be so extensive that he cannot administer it properly without first finding trustworthy aides.

Thus, the simple lessons contained in Jacob's possession of wealth amply illustrate the truth that it is "easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God"

(Mark 10: 25). What then is a believer to do if so endowed by God? How can he avoid the pitfalls of jealousy on hand and false friendship on the other which his wealth seems to provoke? How can he avoid wrong things going on within his estate? With great difficulty is the answer to such questions but a clear guiding principle is given in the Lord's words to Jacob: "Bethel... where thou vowedst a vow" (31: 13). There is a line of teaching in the Scriptures which begins with the "gold" and the "garden" (Gen. 2: 8, 11-12) and which is brought to the fore in the vow of Jacob. It continues with the explicit instructions to Israel regarding the giving of their substance and is most gloriously seen in David who said "Moreover also, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, seeing that I have a treasure of mine own of gold and silver, I give it unto the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house" (1 Chron. 29: 3). Was the Lord interested in David's treasure? The Lord Jesus said "where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also" (Matt 6: 21). God was interested in David's heart about which He elsewhere said »^TI have found David. a man after my heart" (Acts 13: 22). David's heart, like God's, was in the house of God and he proved it by what he did with his wealth. The Lord Jesus continued this line of teaching by speaking repeatedly about "treasure in heaven" (Matt 6: 19-20, 19: 21, Mark 10: 21, Luke 12: 21), and showing how a man can translate his worldly wealth into treasure of a spiritual nature by carrying out His commandments given to disciples in churches of God.

Thus in the matter of the correct use of worldly riches we are brought back to where we began. They are but a means whereby God's kingdom and purposes may be furthered in the process of which blessing to both givers and receivers will reflect that divine giving seen at Calvary when God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

I. E. P.

ERRATUM

Bible Studies 8301 p. 1, para. 2, line 6: **Ephes. 2: 11** should be **1 Peter 2: 11**

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Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8307

The meeting with Laban behind him, Jacob moved on into Canaan. God had intervened on his behalf to smooth the way for him prior to the encounter, and that fact must have encouraged Jacob. Then, as he went on his way, the angels of God met him providing him with further evidence that he was the object of divine protection. Another difficult encounter awaited him, the confrontation with Esau.

The news that Esau was coming to meet him and that he had four hundred men with him distressed Jacob greatly. His immediate reaction was to divide his company into two and then pour out his anxiety in prayer to God (Gen. 32: 7-12). In addition to his prayer Jacob took the very practical step of preparing a present to help turn away the anger of his brother who had been deeply offended at the time of Jacob's departure twenty years previously.

Another unexpected meeting awaited Jacob at the ford of Jabbok, an encounter with God. The wrestling at Jabbok was one of the great experiences in the life of Jacob. He emerged from the struggle with a new name, Israel, and marked as a result of being in the presence of God.

When Jacob and Esau met reconciliation was effected between them. Several of our contributors, in dealing with this event, have pointed out that the actions Jacob took to secure that desirable outcome provide us with enlightening illustrations relating to the truths of atonement and reconciliation. These are also dealt with at some length in a study article on Atonement that appeared in Bible Studies 1969, pp. 49, 61, 74.

Esau did not need his brother's present, he already had enough

and said so, for he had an abundance of this world's goods. Jacob, however, was not impoverished by giving for he was rich through God's gracious dealings with him and had enough (Heb. *all*).

With all the tokens of divine favour that had been bestowed upon him, Jacob's feelings must have been akin to those of the psalmist when he said, "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me"? (Ps. 118: 6).

J. K. D. J.

CORRESPONDENCE

The following suggestion concerning Jacob's use of the rods has been received from brother J. Bowman of Cowdenbeath.

Jacob's **use** of **the** rods.

At his own request Jacob was left with a herd of black goats (Gen 30: 35) from which he was confident he could produce young with markings on their skins. It seems clear that he achieved this and that the kids were marked in three different ways, viz ring-straked, speckled and spotted (v. 39). His success displeased Laban who stipulated he must produce kids of one kind of marking only. This was entirely beyond the skill of Jacob but not of Jacob's God. Therefore according to the particular colour Laban demanded so the Lord produced even although he changed his demand ten times. The vision assured Jacob that it was as if the Lord was being served by the colour of male needed to produce the colour of kids Laban demanded.

FAVOUR WITH GOD AND WITH MAN (Gen. 32: 1-32; 33: 1-17)

From Birkenhead: Our study deals with the man Jacob as a pilgrim on his life's journey under God's control. The pilgrimage which he undertook is emphasized by Jacob himself when he referred to his crossing of the Jordan with his staff, the typical picture of a pilgrim (Gen. 32: 10). However years of strife and difficulty were to be swept away as he found further favour with God and man. Jacob did not know this, of course, and when the Lord instructed him to return to his homeland, whilst this fulfilled his desire, it produced within him a fear of the future. Some twenty years previously he had fled from his brother who had promised to kill him and it would be, therefore, with considerable apprehension that he continued on his journey.

Despite the difficulties of service with Laban, Jacob was conscious of God's goodness to him and uttered, in Genesis 32: 10, a prayer that has been repeated in the hearts of true pilgrims and

followers ever since. It is an expression of appreciation of God's great grace and mercy towards unworthy servants in the revealing of truth, and in the bestowal of blessings both spiritual and material. It seems strange that Jacob, having a clear word from the Lord to return, makes such elaborate plans to appease his brother Esau - making us question the degree of faith he had in God's protecting care [Comment 11

In the midst of his preparations for his meeting with his brother Jacob found himself alone, and then commenced the wrestling which is described in the passage. Our study revealed that this was indeed a real encounter and not a vision. The word "wrestle" was appropriate to the action which took place and Jacob was left with physical evidence of his encounter. With regard to the identity of the opponent we found reference to the event in Hosea 12: 3, 4 where the second wrestler is identified as an angel. However our examination led us to understand that the Lord Jesus had been made manifest to Old Testament characters and was similarly described. It was our conclusion that Jacob did wrestle with God.

The event itself was enacted over some hours and, though the narrative does not lead us to think that Jacob sought this encounter, it was evident that he prolonged it until such time as he received that for which he struggled.

Applying this to the life and spiritual activities of the contemporary pilgrim, we thought there must be occasions when our concern is such that we may "wrestle with God" in prayer. As scripture exhorts us, we should lay hold on God and persevere with our petitions until God makes His answer known to us. We must be prepared for a long wait if this is God's will and we must accept His will when it is revealed.

Clearly Jacob's experience marked him physically and spiritually and his "walk" would be different from that time.

The encounter which he had so feared took place under God's guidance and Jacob was again the recipient of favour and blessing from God. This must surely have been the commendation to a faithful servant.

R. C. Hatpin, R. D. Williams

From **Cowdenbeath:** After a long and difficult struggle with Laban, Jacob, with God's help, prevailed. Another encounter lay before him. He must meet his brother Esau over whom he had prevailed in earlier years. He emerged from that struggle with both the

birthright and the blessing. In doing so, however, he had offended his brother. Before meeting with Esau, Jacob had three quite remarkable experiences.

1. He was met by a host of angels.
2. He spoke to God in confession and earnest prayer.
3. He wrestled with an angel.

Each played a part in preparing him for the vital meeting.

Regarding 1. Was this simply God's way of welcoming back the returning pilgrim, or might it have been, seeing that immediately after this meeting it is recorded "Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau", that he was prompted to do so?

Regarding 2. In answer to his prayer to be delivered from Esau, whom he feared, Jacob was made to realize that, as he had offended his brother, he must take steps towards being reconciled to him. His first plan to divide his company could have done nothing in that direction. Therefore, it was abandoned (v.21) [Comment 10]. Before reconciliation can be affected there must be appeasement (Heb. *kaphar*) or atonement, for so the word is often translated. This is so also in God's dealings with men. As a result of the atonement made by Christ the sinner can be reconciled to God [Comment 11]. Jacob skilfully calculated that as Esau would meet each of the five separate droves in turn, and would receive from the leader of each an identical answer to his question, he would be impressed with Jacob's conciliatory attitude.

Regarding 3, Jacob desired to be alone. Men who would serve God need likewise to spend time separate from their wives and families to prepare for God's service. God's purpose in dealing with Jacob as He did was to bring about a change in the man. He was allowed to wrestle through the hours of the night without gaining any advantage over his assailant. He had to be taught that, in order to obtain Esau's favour, he must be seen to be a changed man. The present he had sent before him would not, in itself, be sufficient. By a touch he was crippled and realising that he could no longer hope for mastery in the struggle he used his great strength to cling as in tears he made supplication (Heb. *chanan*) meaning to implore; (i. e. to move to favour by petition: Dr. Strong). How right he was to be seeking God's favour before seeking Esau's. How right too, that before seeing Esau's face (32: 20 and 33: 10) he should see God's face (32: 30). When he saw Esau he looked upon the face of a forgiving man and in that respect it was like seeing God's face. His humble attitude and manner of speech changed the face of Esau and made him ready to kiss and

embrace him.

Besides having obtained God's favour through prayer, Jacob witnessed to the fact that God favoured him with children (33: 5) and large flocks and herds (33: 11). Although he was happy to be reconciled with Esau Jacob had no desire to have fellowship with him. Esau's offer put Jacob in an awkward situation and, whilst he gave an acceptable reason for not accompanying him, it is not to his credit that he should have promised to go to Seir, if, as it would seem, he had no intention of doing so.

J. Bowman

From Derby: The word favour has a wide range of meaning and application. In the New Testament the word grace is used. It encompasses kindness, blessing or the benefit that comes from blessing. It is the approbation of someone else for one. The epistles are full of teaching and exhortations on this matter.

Continuous favour was shown to Jacob by God. In 33: 5 Jacob refers to " the children which God hath graciously given thy servant". In v. 11 he says "God hath dealt graciously with me". He might have said "everything is through my own skill and effort" but he did not, unlike Nebuchadnezzar who claimed all the credit. Jacob acknowledged the favour of God spontaneously shown to him. How wondrously God has dealt with us. We have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. They have been given to us by God without reservation or condition. Grace tells us of the attitude of God to the sinner in spite of all he is.

We may encourage others to show us favour. This has practical consequences as is seen in the way Jacob approached Esau. He had fears about what was to happen and showed great humility. He acted wisely. There is great power in wisdom. In the New Testament we see its importance. So many mistakes can be attributed to a lack of wisdom. We see Jacob as a strategist in the way he deployed his household. He had the knowledge of how to use it to advantage.

As Esau drew near Jacob's attitude towards him was " to find grace in the sight of my lord" (v. 8). Then in v. 14 he referred to Esau as "my lord" and himself as "his servant".

Jacob had the birthright blessing, but Esau was his elder brother and he was prepared to give him that place. He showed respect to Esau and subjected himself. There is a right way to do right things and we see this in the way Daniel approached the prince of the eunuchs

concerning the food they were to eat.

We must not violate principles to obtain favour with men. Paul went about things in an acceptable way. He was versatile. He wanted to gain men so he made himself all things to all men that he might by all means save some (1 Cor. 9: 19-22).

We should try to find favour with man for the furtherance of the work of the Lord. We should think about the impression we make on men as we try to reach them.

In 1 Pet. 3: 1 wives are told to be in subjection to their own husbands. The unbelieving husbands may be gained by the behaviour of their own wives.

G. W. Conway

From Galston: "The angels of God met him... This is *God's* host" (Gen. 32: 1, 2). He had just experienced the restrained hostility of Laban's host. Now he experiences the uplift, the encouragement of seeing the unseen, protecting presence of God's host. Perhaps this was why he felt the confidence to send to Esau to tell him, without a present, that he was coming.

"Esau cometh... and 400 men with him", Jacob's confidence disappears; he is greatly afraid and distressed. Preservation is his first thought and he does what he can - divides his people and property into two companies. If one is smitten the other should escape.

Then he prays, "... O Lord, which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country... and I will do thee good" (v. 9). After praying he sends a present to Esau. We think it likely that this decision was a persuasion from God - an answer to his prayer. The purpose of the present was to fill the eyes and mind of Esau and change his murderous thoughts of Jacob to acceptable thoughts. In his prayer he recalls how God had blessed him - "with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two companies" (v. 10).

But there is no sleep for Jacob. He must get his two companies over the Jabbok stream. Perhaps he reasoned that the acceptable image of himself, created by the present, would vanish if Esau had to cross a defensive stream.

Now Jacob is alone, separated from those two companies which are part of him; alone with his alternating thoughts, "O Lord which saidst... Return... and I will do thee good". "Esau cometh... and 400 men with him". What a night! What a conflict! The unseen

host of God is forgotten. Jacob is wrestling with doubts and fears, yet he is holding on. Now the word he is holding on to takes bodily form - the form of a Man - a Man who wrestles with Jacob. It is the Word of God who wrestles with Jacob. The nature of the wrestling is seen in Jacob's prayer. Jacob knows it is not simply a physical wrestling where one overcomes another. No, there is a deep meaning to it all. This Man must not get away. The Man touches the hollow of his thigh (the thighs and legs being all-important to the wrestler), and the contest is overt. Just touches him! Jacob holds on. "Let me go for the day breaketh". He weeps and makes supplication to Him (Hosea 12: 4). "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me" (v. 26). God was all important to Jacob. Jacob has prevailed with God. No more Jacob, but Israel. "thou hast had power with God, and thou shalt prevail against men (Gen. 32: 28 RVM).

God takes no pleasure in the strong self-reliant legs of Jacob, but in the Jacob who hopes in His mercy.

"I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (v. 30). Jacob is full of faith. He depends completely on God and this is not qualified because of the dispositions of his families and goods. He does all that he can but he is depending on God. God works for Jacob. He uses the present and the attitude of Jacob towards Esau to turn the heart of Esau. Jacob has found grace with God and with Esau. The lesson God taught Jacob, He is also teaching us. Jacob limped. He had been taught not to trust in his own strength. "We ourselves have had the answer of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead... on whom we have set our hope that He will also still deliver us" (2 Cor. 1: 9-10).

J. H. Johnson

From Leeds: God was with Jacob in all of the twenty years (31: 41) that he was in the land of the people of the East in the house of Laban. The promise of God was "I am with thee, and will keep thee ... and I will bring thee again into this land; I will not leave thee" (28: 15) "Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred, and I will be with thee" (31: 3). At Bethel, whilst he slept, he saw the angels of God and now again, at Mahanaim, the angels of God met him to reassure, strengthen and sustain him.

Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed as he anticipated his meeting again with Esau whom he had not seen for over twenty years, and who was now coming towards him with 400 men (32: 6). Esau comprised the opposition to Jacob's entering into the promised land.

Although Jacob **had a large** company of people **with him**, as well as flocks, **herds and** camels, which **he** split into two companies, God **wanted** Jacob alone. **His** wives, handmaids **and** children **were** also, **during** the night, to **be** separated from **him** (32: 22, 23).

It would **appear** from vv. 22-24 that Jacob **did** not wrestle all **night** with **the man** from God, for it was **during the night** that **he** rose **up** (v. 22) **and** then was alone with **the man** from God until the **breaking of the day** (v. 26). Jacob's **prayer** (32: 9-12) was that of a **man** persevering **and** prevailing, **putting his** "I will" into God's "I will", in the confidence that God's will was **made** clear to him. "If God is for **us**, who is against **us**?... in all these things **we are** more **than** conquerors through **Him** that loved **us**" (Rom. 8: 31, 37). In the purpose of God, **He** sometimes takes **men** alone **and** amongst such **were** Moses (Ex. 24: 2); **Jeremiah** (Jer. 15: 17); Daniel (Dan. 10: 7, 8); **The Lord Jesus** (Luke 9: 18); Paul (Gal. 1: 17).

Jacob **had** power over **the** angel **and** prevailed (Hosea 12: 4). To **have** God's strength Jacob was to lose **his** own; the one whose **hand** lays hold **is** not a "**prince** with God" until the hollow of **his thigh** is out of joint. When **man** is weak **then he** is strong (2 Cor. 12: 9, 10). We **have** to lay hold of God, **and** not **let** go, to **gain** the blessing.

Jacob (supplanter) becomes Israel (**prince** with God) at Peniel (**the face** of God).

H. R. Dodge

From Liverpool: *Facing Esau.* Jacob did not have to go the way he went and did not have to meet Esau. Spiritually, however, he had to attempt to put things right between himself and his brother and in any event they would have met eventually and, in fact, their descendants had to live side by side. Jacob had wronged Esau and clearly had a guilty conscience [Comment 2].

Appeasement. Jacob was not lacking in faith in the protection of God when he sent the elaborate presents to Esau*. He was a wiser man by now, recognizing that an offended brother is harder to win than an armed struggle. Faith without deeds, according to James, is dead and here Jacob showed his faith by his deeds. We could not decide what motivated Esau. On one hand why should he come marching towards Jacob with 400 men except with intent to harm him and exact revenge? On the other, time would have healed and he had done as well, materially, as his brother and he seemed genuine in his affection. Whatever the truth, the gifts illustrate the true meaning of atonement - to appease with presents and afterwards to see his face.

Eastern Customs. Except to note that their culture and customs were very different from ours, it is hard to see what all the bowing and subservient talk means. However, it appears:

- (1) Esau did not intend to refuse the gifts, but etiquette dictated the "Take it" - "No thanks" - "Go on" - "In that case I will" ritual.
- (2) Jacob was not grovelling before Esau although his apprehension may have led him to excessive bowings and flattery! [Comment 5].

Facing God. Jacob was in the will of God at this point and was going to Bethel (albeit by a detour). Having been attacked, Jacob fought and realised after some time that this was no mugger or bandit, but a divine fight. The man fought with Jacob, not Jacob with the man; it was presumably a theophany [see Question] and whatever he might have seen in the daylight God did not want him to see it. Despite the darkness it was a very real experience to Jacob and he would always remember the time that God appeared to him as an enemy and foe [Comment 3].

The fight was not to gain something but to break Jacob down in order to bless him. Jacob walked away from this experience, lame for the rest of his life, and the fact that he had fought with God would be clearly seen. Each of us must struggle with God in order to be broken down so that God can bless us. Such an experience should be evidenced by everybody.

The change of name signified a change of attitude, but significantly he is afterwards often referred to as Jacob - hence life's spiritual ups and downs.

D. J. Webster

From **Manchester:** Jacob goes out of his way to show respect to Esau because he is afraid that Esau might take revenge on him, even though twenty years have passed since Jacob tricked Esau. Jacob refers to Esau as "my Lord" [Comment 2].

Fearing the worst, Jacob is distressed when he learned that Esau and 400 of his men were on their way to meet him. Jacob cries out to God in his moment of fear. His prayer is one from which we can learn. Firstly we can pray to God in our moment of need, and secondly his prayer is tactful and worthy of consideration. Jacob acknowledges his unworthiness before God; thanks God for blessings received, and then makes his request for deliverance before claiming the promises that God gave him.

Despite the fact that Jacob has prayed, he still wants to find favour with Esau through all these material gifts. Was this because

Jacob had doubts in spite of his prayer and his faith was not strong enough, or was he taking these actions in response to his faith? Surely he should have prayed and waited on God? [Comment 1].

Later, when Jacob is left alone, God appears in the form of a man and wrestles with Jacob. Jacob was persistent in asking for a blessing and would not let the Man go until he had done so. Jacob, therefore received a blessing. The lesson to draw from this is that we should be persistent in our prayer requests just as the widow the Lord spoke about in the parable was (Luke 18: 1-8).

Jacob was crippled after his encounter with God. The effect was visible to those whom he met. There should be a visible effect on our lives after our encounter with God. The world should be able to see a change in our attitudes and outlook, and consequently a change in the way we live [Comment 7].

When Jacob and Esau meet, Jacob almost begs Esau to accept his gift of appeasement. It would seem that Jacob had to hand over this gift to Esau to calm his guilty conscience [see Comment 2]. Once he achieved this task, and found favour with Esau, Jacob works to part company with his twin "while the going is good". Jacob's fears were unjustified and imaginary because, when they met, Esau was not angry but loving [see Comment 8]. Sometimes we have imaginary and uncalled for fears in our lives because of our lack of trust in God.

One might well ask, did Jacob act and perform as he should have done? Did he do the right thing in the way he offered gifts, bowed seven times (a recognition of kingly dignity), and treat Esau as superior to him? These acts do not seem to be in keeping with putting his trust in God or with signs of spiritual maturity. It would appear he was dealing with his brother after the ways of the flesh rather than in God's ways [Comment 8]. [Comment 12].

J. Clarke, S. Verner

From Nottingham: It was suggested, while reading chapter 32, that here was a case of what could be described as ^Mout of the frying pan into the fire", as far as Jacob was concerned. After a potentially disastrous incident with Laban, Jacob met Esau and his 400 men! And yet the simple fact was that God had said "Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with you" (31: 3).

We found that Jacob's prayer in Genesis 32: 9-12 contained some interesting points that could be valuable in our own prayer-life.

Firstly, Jacob reminded God of His promises towards his offspring who were possibly in danger, in view of Esau's belligerent mood. Should we make a point of reminding God of His promises towards us as believers?

Also, Jacob supplemented his prayer with action whereas he could have just prayed and then waited to see what happened. With regard to this we were reminded of the old adage, "work as if prayer did no good, pray as if work did no good"¹¹ [Comment 9].

Jacob's prayer and subsequent action also reminded us of another very important lesson in our private prayers. That is, we are sometimes tempted to use prayer as a rubber stamp on a matter that in reality we have already decided upon. This was not the case with Jacob, who took action after an evening of seeking the Lord's guidance.

It also seemed that Jacob's prayer had a depth and feeling brought about by the seriousness of his position. We admitted, too, that amongst ourselves such a depth of prayer will only come about through adversity.

We found that Jacob's wrestling incident was both interesting and instructive. Firstly it appears that Jacob was wrong when he said "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (32: 30). John chapter 1 tells us that no-one has ever seen God and Hosea 12 seems to clarify the position by describing Jacob's wrestling partner as an angel [Comment 4]. However, the incident does seem to have been a humbling experience for Jacob and also a turning point: from then on he was neither a businessman nor a farmer, but a man of God re-named Israel [Comment 6],

For ourselves, too, we felt there is a need to be found wrestling in prayer with the Lord before we can expect power or blessing. As an example of this we were particularly reminded of the apostle Paul who speaks of his "struggles" for the Colossian saints (Col. 2: 1).

C. Edis

COMMENTS

1. (Birkenhead and Manchester): Alternatively we might justifiably view his actions as those of a wise man who put his trust in God and at the same time took sensible precautions for the protection of his loved ones and his goods. There was also a conciliatory element in his actions. The present was prepared for the express purpose of turning away his brother's wrath and making a reconciliation between

them possible. This viewpoint is taken by several of our contributors, for example: Cowdenbeath, Derby, Liverpool and Nottingham.

2. (**Liverpool and Manchester**): This viewpoint has, of course, already been expressed by our friends and by several of our other contributors, and editors have commented upon it (see BS. 8301, Editorial and Comment 1). Distinction has also been made by editors between Jacob's actions in obtaining the birthright and his actions in obtaining the blessing (see BS. 8302, Comments 5 and 6 pp. 28, 29).

It is worth pointing out that the only recorded criticism of Jacob's actions in the Scriptures comes from the lips of Esau and Laban, and their opinions are not endorsed in the divine record. Esau is described as a "profane person" and his willingness to sell his birthright cheaply is specifically condemned in Scripture (Heb. 12: 16). God is very explicit in speaking of His rejection of Esau and of His favour shown to Jacob (Mai. 1: 2, 3). I would consider Jacob was troubled not by his conscience but by fear that Esau might be still prepared to make good the threat he had made those twenty years earlier.

J. K. D. J.

We may be absolutely certain that Jacob did not have a guilty conscience on the occasion of his meeting Esau. God does not draw men with guilty consciences to His dwelling place; nor does He reveal Himself in matters of service to such men. (See for example Psalm 24: 3-4). Jacob's guilt in the matter of the blessing must therefore have been settled prior to his arriving at Bethel (Gen 28: 11). This is a very fundamental issue and is at the heart of the gospel of the kingdom of God today. Men must first have their guilt removed and then they must demonstrate their good conscience in baptism. Only then may they have dealings with God in His house (1 Pet. 3: 21, Acts 2: 41-2). Were it not so then churches of God could be composed of men whose sins have not been forgiven. Having obtained clearance of guilt from God, however, a believer may still need to be reconciled to men whom he has offended.

I. E. P.

3. (**Liverpool**): While it is true that it was the stranger who took the initiative in the struggle, the ultimate objective of the wrestling was the blessing of Jacob, a point very clearly made in your contribution, so the stranger was not in reality an enemy or foe with hostile intentions.

4. (**Nottingham**): Hosea 12: 3, 4 sets two statements side by side relating to Jacob's experience at Peniel, "in his manhood he had power with God: Yea, he had power over the angel and prevailed". There can be little doubt that the stranger who wrestled with Jacob was more than an angel although appearing to him in human form, temporarily assumed, so that Jacob might have face-to-face contact with Him (see also answer to the question from Leeds).

J. K. D. J.

5. (Liverpool): Friends in Liverpool correctly outline the eastern practice of reaching financial agreement. Perhaps the most outstanding example of this is the case of Abraham (Gen. 23). The force of the word "urged" (Gen. 33: 11), however, suggests that Esau's reluctance was genuine. In his dealings with Esau, Jacob illustrates the truth "if it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men" (Rom. 12: 18) and exemplifies the Lord's teaching "agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art with him in the way" (Matt. 5: 25). As to his methods, he showed the wisdom of Solomon who said "a soft answer turneth away wrath" (Prov. 15: 1). The number of times he bowed to the ground recalls Naaman's actions in the Jordan (2 Kings 5) and instructs us in the need for humility in carrying out such commands of the Lord.

6. (**Nottingham**): Jacob continued to be a businessman and farmer after his experience at Peniel just as he was a man of God before it. A man or woman of God is a person who has reached a certain stage of spiritual growth. God does not wrestle with babes and children. A man or woman, having attained spiritual maturity, is then a fit person to have power with God.

I. E. P.

7. (Manchester): Jacob's experience at Peniel might correspond to particular spiritual experiences in our lives, when we are conscious of having intimate dealings with God in our lives, and which leave their mark on us, rather than to our spiritual experience at conversion, which appears to be what is being suggested in your contribution.

8. (Manchester): I have no doubt that Jacob was right in acting as he did. He was a man of prayer *and* a man of action. He prayed about his problem and then he did all that he could to lessen it. His conciliatory attitude and manifest desire for reconciliation, attested by his actions, played no small part in placating his brother. His fears were by no means groundless.

A spiritually-minded person will do all he can to gain his offended

brother, and Jacob's actions are worthy of emulation.

J. K. D. J.

9. (**Nottingham**): At the same time, God "worketh for him that waiteth for Him" (Isaiah 64: 4).

E. A.

10. (**Cowdenbeath**): I do not see Gen. 32: 21 as an indication of the abandonment of the original plan. The present, in its five droves, and those who accompanied it formed the first company, which passed over the river in advance of the remainder (32: 21). Jacob and his family were in the second company, which passed over during the night, except for Jacob himself (vv 21,22).

P. L. H.

11. (**Cowdenbeath**): One feels rather uneasy at the use of this passage as an illustration of atonement. Atonement involves:

- (1) Admission of guilt; i. e. liability to just penalty.
- (2) Provision of a full satisfaction for the penalty; i. e. a propitiation.

A fellow editor suggests in Comment 2 that Jacob was not troubled by conscience of guilt but merely by fear of Esau. It is necessary for Esau's wrath to be justly grounded for the analogy to stand. The use of the word "appeasement" in relation to Jacob's actions suggests that he was seeking to "buy off" Esau by means of gifts. This was indeed so; but this is an inadequate illustration of the second component of atonement. God cannot be diverted from His intentions by the offering of gifts; the propitiation offered by Christ was a complete satisfaction to God's just requirements against sin. It may seem unduly critical to comment thus on what Cowdenbeath friends only provide as an illustration, but the idea of the atonement as an appeasement of an angry God by giving Him presents has been used by opponents of the doctrine of atonement - representing it as a crude and primitive religious doctrine which should be abandoned.

P. L. H.

12. (**Manchester**): Fellow students will observe that this well argued paper is written in the present tense. The events described occurred thousands of years ago and would normally be written about in the past tense. Indeed this is how the Scriptures, themselves, tell the story. The usual reason for describing past events in the present tense is for dramatic effect. It is to make the reader feel he is actually there. It will be observed that, when writing, students of the Scriptures frequently use the present tense when dramatic effect is

not intended or useful. We have thought that this is because, when reading the Scriptures, the believer is constantly looking to hear God speaking to him. So, understanding the words to have a present meaning, it seems natural to write of past events in the present tense. We would suggest, however, that it would lead to helpful distinction in exposition were we to use the past tense to deal with the narrative of the natural events and the present tense to describe the spiritual and eternal truths we have learned from the narrative.

For example, it would be incorrect to say in connection with Dinah's behaviour in Genesis 34 that "his daughter is immediately attracted by the inhabitants of the city and proves the necessity for the guidance of Ex. 33: 16'. Dinah was not in the business of proving the necessity for such guidance. It is the Scriptures, not Dinah, which do so. Thus we would suggest that it would be more accurate to say "his daughter was immediately attracted . . . and proves.... ". Finally, it may be worth pointing out that writers, having begun in the present tense, frequently in the course of writing, forget. The result is then a confusing jumble of past and present.

I. E. P.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

1. From **Leeds**: How can we reconcile the experience of Jacob seeing God face to face (Gen. 32: 30) with the statement in John **1: 18**, "no man hath seen God at any time" ?

This question opens up a fascinating subject. The statement in John 1: 18 is a plain statement of fact. The nature of God's being is such that He cannot be seen by man. He is the "invisible God" (Col. 1: 15). The glory associated with the divine presence cannot be looked upon by mortal man. God said to Moses, "thou canst not see My face: for man shall not see Me and live" (Ex. 33: 18-23). Paul speaks of the Lord Jesus, now at the right-hand of God, "dwelling in light unapproachable" (1 Tim. 6: 16).

The hymn-writer has accurately expressed these truths thus:

Holy and Infinite, viewless, eternal,
Veiled in the glory that none can sustain,
None comprehendeth Thy Being supernal
Nor can the heaven of heavens contain.

That being so, however, there are incidents in the Scripture that require an explanation to reconcile them with the very definite pronouncements that have been referred to. The following are referred to for consideration:

"Then went up Moses, and Aaron and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: and they saw the God of Israel¹¹ (Ex. 24: 9, 10).

"And Manoah said unto his wife, we shall surely die/ because we have seen God" (Judg. 13: 22).

"I saw the LORD sitting upon a throne" (Is. 6: 1).

"I saw visions of God" (Ezek. 1: 1).

What **did these persons see ? They saw manifestations of God that could be perceived by their senses. In some instances the form of a man was temporarily assumed. When angels, who are spirit beings and not normally visible, revealed themselves, it was in the form of men that they did so. There are also instances where the particular title, "the Angel of the LORD" is used, and this person is recognized as a divine being (see Judg. 13: 21, 22). It is widely held that these latter instances are pre-incarnate appearances of the Son of God. The term "theophany" has been used for such appearances.**

In the fulness of time the Son of God became incarnate, and God was manifested in the flesh (1 Tim 3: 16). Men were then privileged to look on One who was God in human form. The full glory of deity was laid aside by the Lord for His incarnation and His own intrinsic glory was veiled in that body of blood and flesh. The experience, however, was not to be a transient one. In that body, now glorified, and having immortality He is at the right-hand of God. One day we shall see Him and be like Him (1 John 3: 2).

In the Book of Revelation John depicts the glorious foursquare city in its eternal setting and says, "the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein. * and His servants shall do Him service; and they shall see His face". There, in the power of heavenly sight, we shall gaze upon the throne and upon the face of Him who sits upon it, the once-slain Lamb.

J. K. D. J.

It is my opinion that the words of 1 Tim. 6: 16 apply to God the Father, despite the comments which have been made by many respected brethren about the use of the word "immortality" here. See the NIV interpretation of the passage. There is, of course, room for difference of opinion here.

P. L. H.

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Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17:11]

EDITORIAL

8308

It is scarcely possible to read the verses before us in this month's study without being transfixed by the account of the spreading venom of sin. From apparently harmless beginnings it eventually permeated both communities dwelling at Shechem to such an extent that it almost brought about their total mutual destruction. These scriptures give a classic account of the working of the Devil and of the kind of future he plans for humanity.

Jacob came at the height of his powers and prosperity to make a new life for himself in the land which had been promised to his lineage. His eldest sons were now coming to manhood but if he had been looking to see them blossoming in spiritual things then he was most cruelly disappointed. To many it might seem a harmless enough thing to dwell at Shechem. To the man, however, to whom God had revealed the truth of the house of God, it was a serious mistake to dwell there with the permanence implied in the purchase of the ground and the building of the altar.

Dinah, too, started out apparently innocently enough but was soon trapped by the prince of the land. Although the latter took the lead in the affairs, his subsequent actions show that he was not altogether a wicked young man; but the deed was done and try as he might he was unable to stop what followed.

Perhaps sensing that his eldest sons were now men, Jacob waited to involve them in the decision, before taking action. Alas, although grown to manhood, they showed the impetuosity of immaturity by taking matters into their own hands. Something of the cunning and cruelty of the Serpent is seen in their vengeance upon the men of the city. The latter were ensnared by greed before being made to look fools prior to their death and despoliation. Humiliation and death are the hallmarks of a successful stratagem of the Devil, but the perpetrators suffered, too, for the behaviour of Simeon and Levi led to

a lasting estrangement of heart from their father and loss to their descendants (Gen. 49: 5-7).

Worse was to follow the slaughter at Shechem. Jacob could see that not only was his testimony ruined but the position of himself and his descendants in the patriarchal lineage was also placed in jeopardy. His testimony having gone, of what further use was he to God? Why should God further protect him? Jacob was taken from the heights of spiritual power as depicted in chapter 32 to ruined impotence in chapter 34. It is hard to imagine so much being lost in so short a time. How characteristic of the Devil that, having failed to bring Jacob down after so long, he should finally succeed by attacking him through his family. Believers of lesser ability than Jacob should be thankful that they may have constant recourse to One who can save to the uttermost those who draw nigh to God through Him (Heb. 7: 25).

As we view the rising crescendo of the effects of sin, lessons of a salutary nature lie on every hand. It is difficult, however, to find anything in these verses that is just, pure and of good report on which to think. At least Hamor and Shechem knew that wrong had been done and reparation needed to be made. Perhaps, too, the deceit of Jacob's sons¹ plan shows that, having not the slightest intention of uniting the two communities which dwelt at Shechem, they had at least learned something of the importance of separation. In addition, it may be that the events taught the young Joseph, who was not much younger than Dinah, a lesson which he was quick to apply when he was a servant in Potiphar's house. Of one thing we can be certain: that just as the simple and swift command of the Lord (35: 1) to go up to Bethel and dwell there rescued Jacob and his house in his hour of need, so the trouble at Shechem and its consequences would have been avoided had he gone first to Bethel and dwelt there on his return from Paddan-aram.

7. E. P.

THE TIMES OF THE PATRIARCHS (continued from BS. 8306 page 87)

While Mari flourished the then small city of Babylon also grew and gained power. Its most distinguished king was Hammurabi whose reign is usually dated from c. 1792 to 1750 BC, although some scholars place him later. The Babylonians were a learned and skilled people, their scribes being particularly active. The kingdom was run efficiently, the king being assisted by officials in his government. Society consisted, broadly, of three classes; the aristocracy from which officials were drawn, the farmers and professional classes, and the slaves. Hammurabi is famous as a law-giver and an eight-foot high stele of black diorite was found at Susa in 1902 bearing his law code.

A continual state of unrest existed between the rulers of these dynasties and about 1760 BC Hammurabi attacked and destroyed Mari and continued to rule in Babylon until 1750 BC, but soon after his death the power of Babylon began to decline and c. 1595 BC, after the time of the Patriarchs, the city was sacked by the Hittites and the Kassites, but that was not the end of Babylon. The city was destined to rise again for this place, once a village by the Euphrates, had a role to fulfil in the divine purpose. While Jacob was having the experiences which are the subject of our current study, God was over-ruling in the affairs of men and among the nations preparing a city which, one day, long after the times of the Patriarchs, would play a significant part in the experiences of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

(To be continued)

R. Hickling

THE SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT

The meaning of the term

In the Old Testament, "atonement" is the translation of Heb. *kaphar* implying covering. It occurs primarily in Leviticus and Numbers, where it always appears in relation to the result of a sacrifice brought on behalf of someone or something which was unclean or sinful before God. For example in Lev. 5: 17-19, the law describes how a man who was guilty before God could deal with his guilt. He acknowledged that he was guilty by bringing the sacrifice, and the offering of the sacrifice covered his guilt before God, so that he was forgiven. However, atonement was not only required when there was specific sin to be confessed before God. The man in Lev. 1 wished to offer an oblation to the Lord, but the burnt offering was still "accepted for him to make atonement for him". The holiness of God is such that no-one can be accepted by Him without a covering from His wrath against sin. Atonement in the Old Testament, then, denotes the act of sacrifice which secures freedom from liability to the wrath of God against sin.

In the New Testament, the word "atonement" is not used at all in the Revised Version. It appears in the A. V. in Rom. 5: 11 as a translation of Gk. *katallage*, but this is better translated "reconciliation" (as R. V.) and does not refer to the topic under discussion. The New Testament uses the group of words based on Gk. *Hilaskomai*, to propitiate, to express the idea of atonement. Propitiation can be defined as "the removal of wrath by the offering of a gift", and the most well known occurrence of the term is, of course, Rom. 3: 24-26. This passage will be examined in some detail in dealing with the matter of the atonement, but it will suffice here to point out that

"reconciliation" could not be substituted for "propitiation" in it. Confusion has arisen because the English word "atonement" has its origin in at-one-ment; i. e. reconciliation. W. E. Vine (Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, 1952, p. 86) says "the explanation of this English word as being at-one-ment is entirely fanciful" but this etymology is given by the Oxford Dictionary, This original sense was used once in the A. V., as has been pointed out above, but as early as 1611, according to O. E. D., the word was used by theologians to refer to the act of propitiation, and this is now the only sense in which it is used; it corresponds closely to the usage in the Old Testament, as defined in the paragraph above. The concept of atonement therefore occurs throughout the Scriptures, even though the term is not used in the New Testament.

(To be continued)

p. L. Hickling

IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF IT (Gen. 33: 18 - 34: 31)

From Birkenhead: Jacob's journeyings were not conducted in isolation. He had to dwell and move amongst those who shared with him his faith in God and also those who followed their own gods. Amongst those who shared his beliefs one would imagine were those of his family and our study this month involves the responsibilities of one to another as well as those of each towards God.

It is not readily apparent whether Jacob felt that the Lord's promise to return to his own land (the land of his fathers) had been fulfilled when he reached Shechem. It has been suggested that at this time Jacob was not living as closely to the Lord as he had done since it was apparently his intention to settle in the city of Shechem. The failure of the father to wait upon the Lord may well have given Satan the opportunity for which he was waiting to infiltrate the family. Jacob made evident his willingness to settle amongst a people who did not share his beliefs and his family proceeded to mix with them.

The result of this was an intermingling of views and beliefs and an adulteration of the truths which had been imparted to Jacob. The father, the daughter and the sons all became involved in a relationship with unbelievers. Jacob appears to have lost sight of the fact that he was journeying and settled down to live close to the city. His daughter was attracted by the inhabitants of the city, proving necessity for the guidance of Ex. 33: 16 and Jehovah's law of Deut. 7: 2, 3.

New Testament teaching is given through Paul in 2 Cor. 6: 14 - 7: 1. Dinah's experience and the subsequent trouble were direct Results of the failure of Jacob to keep himself and his family separate from those he

had need to be in contact with during his pilgrimage. The events show how easily we can become inextricably tangled with the world as we take our journey through it.

The result of the encounter was that Jacob's witness for God and his stand as God's ambassador were diminished and he could say of his own position that "ye have troubled me, to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land" (Gen. 34: 30).

That God wants believers today to be a special people for Himself is obvious from 1 Pet. 2: 9. He not only expects us to be separated from the world, but He has a particular purpose in our being so - "a people for God's own possession, that ye may show..." [Comment 1].

The Lord had previously guided and strengthened Jacob as he came into contact with others in his life. He would continue to bless and guide Jacob whose pilgrimage should have been directed through the peoples that surrounded them and not have been amongst them.

R. C. M. Bolt, R. C. Halpin

From Cowdenbeath: In making his journey from Peniel to Bethel Jacob had, of necessity, to follow a route which would provide pasture for his large flocks and herds and which would take him to one of the fords of Jordan. Succoth lay along such a route and, being a valley (Ps. 60: 6), was a suitable stopping place as also was Shechem on the west side of the river.

It seems clear that he spent a few years living in these two places since Dinah, who was near in age to Joseph and could only have been a girl when she left Paddan, had grown to be a young teenager. Whereas it would be difficult to justify Jacob for his stay in Shechem it is nevertheless to his credit that he made his separated position clear by purchasing a piece of land on which to set up his encampment [Comment 2]. The fact that he "pitched his tent" shows, too, that he manifested that he was not a settler but a pilgrim. The words of his sons in v. 17 show that they also recognized this. In addition Jacob erected an altar showing that he was a worshipper of God. Perhaps his encampment with the altar central to it was in miniature like the encampment of Israel round the Tabernacle. Therefore, although living close to Shechem he was not part of it [Comment 3].

The world can have its attractions for young people as is proved in the case of Dinah. There is a danger in seeking the company of worldly people. Jacob had taught his family a high standard of moral behaviour (v. 7), but the standards in Shechem were different. It is

noticeable that neither Shechem nor his father spoke of wrong having been done to Dinah. What the word of God teaches the child of God is wrong is not considered so by the world. It is a dangerous place for the young believer because of its low moral standards.

What was offered to Jacob's sons is what the world today offers to the believer. It says, ^Mgive up your separated position, become integrated in our way of life and choose life-partners from among us".

The strong desire to be avenged for the dishonour done to their sister led her brothers to act firstly with guile and then in brutal treachery. They had just cause to be angry, but if only they had suppressed their anger and acted according to words written later for our guidance how different things would have been. "Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto wrath... vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12: 19).

On hearing the disturbing news regarding Dinah, Jacob decided to take no action until he had discussed the matter with his sons. If only they had shown the same consideration for him then surely they would have been prevented from their intended action. The counsel of parents and older ones should be sought and not despised by younger ones. Independent action can have regretful consequences.

J. Bowman

From Derby: This is a sad episode in the life of Jacob. As a pilgrim and a sojourner he came to the same Shechem that his grandfather came to (Gen. 12). He followed Abraham's example in building an altar in thankfulness to God, but he followed the example of Lot in pitching his tent too near to the city. Jacob was so close to the community that he had to buy the parcel of land. It is interesting to see that his family still had undisputed possession of it while they were living in Egypt and Joseph's body was taken for burial there (Gen. 33: 19; 48: 22; Josh. 24: 32; John 4: 5). We are told to come out and be separate and what a tragedy would have been averted if Jacob had followed that advice with his family. Dinah, in her girlish curiosity, went out to see the place, unknown to the rest of her family. We can bring disaster upon ourselves by meddling in the affairs of the world, but we have "our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that he might deliver us out of this present evil world" (Gal. 1: 3-4). Jacob was the first to hear the sad news, but in keeping with his cautious character he "held his peace" (Gen. 34: 5). His sons, however, were very different. A great wrong had been committed and they were going to avenge it. Hamor was keen to make an alliance with them and, knowing that it was in direct opposition to God's will for them,

they pretended to agree to it. They worked deviously to achieve their goal. They did not have the same spirit as David who could say that he could not kill Saul, although he had been sorely provoked.

Shechem was prepared to give anything to have Dinah for his wife. The world today offers much, but we must be careful that we do not grasp after temporal things and lose our spiritual heritage. Abraham had been told to go out and leave all.

The rite of circumcision was used by the brothers to bring about the downfall of their enemy. We are told in Romans 2: 29 "but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God". No praise came out of this affair. When Jacob heard of the cruel slaughter he was first of all worried for his own position in the land and only later did he think of the perfidiousness of their deed. He cursed their fierce anger and their cruel wrath on his death-bed (Gen. 49: 5-7).

In 1 Pet. 2: 9 we can see what God's will is for us. We are to be a people for God's own possession that we may show forth the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. We can only do this if we are in the world but not of it.

The Lord Jesus Christ said, "I pray not that thou shouldst take them from the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world" (John 17: 15, 16).

G. W. Conway

From Galston: There are five principal characters in this passage and we can learn something from each of them about our position in, and our attitude towards, this present evil world,

Jacob: Jacob "came in peace to the city of Shechem" after two alarming and troublesome experiences (with Laban and then Esau), but we questioned whether he should have encamped so near to Shechem, for in so doing he led his family into temptation. Buying the parcel of ground from Hamor appears to be another step in the wrong direction, in view of the scripture "we have not here an abiding city" (Heb. 13: 14). Jacob knew that he was to be a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth as his fathers were before him; he had just come through two testing experiences in which God had proved his ability to look after him. Was he in the mind of God when he bought the land? Considering the meaning of the name Hamor, "an ass", which is a figure of rebellious man in the scriptures (Job 11: 12) and the fact that under the law the firstling of an ass was to be redeemed with a lamb (Ex. 13: 13), we

incline to the view that Jacob should not **have made this purchase** [Comment 2]. It must **have been a** dreadful shock to Jacob when he **heard of his** daughter's dishonour, but disciplined gentleman that he **was, he did not give way to anger** but held **his peace** until his sons returned. **In contrast** Jacob's sons were "**very wroth**" (34: 7) and their **anger** led them to formulate **a cunning** deception **which should never have come from the lips of men** who worshipped the God of Israel. Jacob continued to hold **his peace** while his sons went **ahead with their** dastardly plan (v. 13-17). Why **did he** do so? [Comment 41. **If he had asserted his responsibility as leader, and prevented his sons from committing deceit and slaughter, surely God would have supported him?** **Perhaps** Jacob was not leaning **hard** enough on the Lord **in this** ugly situation. **The lesson here for us is plain enough.**

Dinah: Dinah seems to **have set aside any teaching** of separation that she **had heard from her father** who, no doubt, endeavoured to **make** God's purpose **in Abraham's seed** very clear to his family. **In setting aside her** separated position and deliberately going out to **befriend** the people of the land, **Dinah placed herself in a dangerous situation** of temptation and judgement. (**Dinah's name means "judgement" and she brought judgement on herself because she tempted God by her action.** **The Christian should beware of forming close friendships with unbelievers, since our adversary, the Devil, will do all he can through such apparently harmless unions to destroy God's purpose for us as individuals.**

Shechem: Shechem was "**honoured above all the house of his father**" (Gen. 34: 19) which seems to **imply** that he was a **very polished and able young man**. To **all outward appearances he was an extremely desirable acquaintance**. **If Shechem had really loved Dinah would he have humbled her?** We think not [Comment 5]. Shechem was a smooth-talker: **the contrast between what he says to Jacob and his sons in v. 11 and 12 ("Let me find grace in your eyes... ask me never so much dowry and gift... but give me the damsel...") and what he says to his own people in v. 23 ("shall not their cattle and their substance and all their beasts be ours?") reveals the two-faced character of Shechem and brings to mind the words of the king of Sodom to Abraham "Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself" (Gen. 14: 21).** Shechem was a tool of the adversary, Satan, for **if Jacob's sons had fallen in with Hamor's devilish suggestions (v. 9-12), God's purpose in them and all that the royal line promised in the coming Messiah, would have been destroyed.** Christians **can never ally themselves with the world, its systems or its things without doing much damage to themselves and the people of God.**

Simeon and Levi: The sons of Jacob were "grieved, and they were very wroth" (Gen. 34: 7), when they were told of Shechem's affront to the honour of their sister; which shows that they had a far higher standard of morality than Shechem who was a prince among his people. However, the sons of Jacob did not display the same godly restraint as their father did in the matter: instead they took the law into their own hands and wreaked terrible and excessive vengeance upon the men of Shechem (vv. 25-29). In doing so they brought further dishonour to Israel (v. 30) and, more seriously, to the God of Israel. God's displeasure at their actions is recorded in the words: "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). The Christian should be extremely careful not to lose his or her temper no matter what cause there may be for indignation. "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (Jas. 1: 20).

P. J. Johnson, D. Ramage

From **Liverpool:** Jacob journeyed to Succoth and built a house for himself and booths for his cattle. Then he came to the city of Shechem and encamped before it (Gen. 33: 17-18), so far removed from the high-light of his pilgrimage when God revealed Himself to him at Bethel.

At the commencement of this passage we see the divine principle that "none of us liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself" (Rom. 14: 7), for Jacob's decision to move to Shechem placed his family in a compromising position and brought disgrace to his young daughter, Dinah.

Jacob's sons treated lightly the things of God when they sought to use circumcision as a means of retaliation, and in such a cruel way. Circumcision was the physical sign of the covenant of separation unto God and to use it for any other purpose reveals an attitude of indifference to God's claims upon them. We read that the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor with guile (v. 13), but at the centre of all the scheming here can be seen the father of guile. Satan intended to destroy the Seed-Royal, for Christ was to come through the line of Judah. If he could prevent this, as seen in the suggestion of integration, the whole purpose of God in the Lord Jesus would be frustrated (34: 9).

In studying this portion we are reminded of Paul's words to those in his day, "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers... wherefore come ye out from among them, and be ye separate..." (2 Cor. 6: 14-18). The Lord Jesus in His prayer to His Father said concerning His own, "They are not of the world" (John 17: 14) and again "Thine

they were, and Thou gavest them to Me" (v. 6).

So that, belonging to Christ, we should ever seek to manifest this in our separation from the world unto Him.

J. W. Seddon

From Nottingham: Jacob's experiences, related in the portion which is the subject of this month's study, stand in stark contrast to those recorded in Genesis 32: 22-32. After the strange but wonderful experience at Peniel we find Jacob entering one of the saddest episodes of his life as revealed in Scripture. The portion under consideration may be divided into two inter-related sections. The second section gives an account of events which were the sequel of those in the first part (Gen. 33: 18-20).

In spite of Jacob's words to Esau, (33: 14), "... until I come unto my lord unto Seir", Jacob did not go to Seir in the land of Edom but journeyed in a different direction to Succoth. Whether Jacob had any intention of going to Seir and thought better of it or whether they were empty words without any real intention does not seem to be clear.

Succoth was in the Jordan valley (Josh. 13: 27; Judges 8: 5, 15-16; 1 Kings 7: 46), and it is likely there were rich pastures in the area. If this is so then it would explain, in part, why Jacob was attracted to the place and decided to settle there, presumably for some time. Whatever the reasons that prompted Jacob's action we believe he was wrong in what he did because God had called him to Bethel and he ought to have passed Succoth by as he went on his pilgrim way. We are reminded of a similar situation in the experiences of Abraham, when he was on his journey from Mesopotamia to the land of Canaan, when family relationships appear to have hindered his progress at Haran for it was "when his father was dead" (Acts 7: 4) that he resumed his travels to the land of promise. It is a grief to God when believers fail to be obedient to the revealed will of God stopping short to associate themselves with something that appeals to them.

Jacob, the man of the tent (Heb. 11: 9), had now become a man with a house and booths for his cattle, a situation which is not characteristic of a true pilgrim who has "not here an abiding city" but seeks "after the city which is to come" (Heb. 13: 14).

After some time Jacob came to Shechem, and it was observed he came there "in peace" (Gen. 33: 18), but he left the place in anything but peace. He encamped "before the city", a very unwise act which is reminiscent of Lot who "moved his tent as far as Sodom" (Gen. 13: 12). Jacob was now dwelling again "in tents" and one wonders if his

reversion to **this** form of living was **just due** to circumstances or prompted by some **unease** of conscience over **his having a house in Succoth**. His **buying of the parcel of ground** implies Jacob's intention of **remaining there** for some time rather than going on to Bethel. **If** Jacob left Laban **in the springtime**, **as seems possible from the reference to the lambing (chapters 30 and 31)**, there **seems to be no reason why** Jacob should not **have gone directly to Bethel which was the place of the Name**. He **appears to be loitering on the way**, slow to carry out the will of God. "Therefore let **us also... lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us...** " (Heb. 12: 1).

The thought of Jacob's intention to establish a relatively permanent dwelling in Shechem is supported, we suggest, by the word "erected" used in Gen. 33: 20, and which word appears nowhere else in Scripture. It is a translation of a Hebrew word natsabh which seems to have in its meaning a degree of permanence and which is different from the word translated "built" used in many other places in reference to the construction of an altar. We know (Gen. 12: 6, 7) that Abraham built an altar at Shechem when he first came into the land and we thought it possible that Jacob might know this and be following his father's example, but the fact remains that Jacob had received a fuller revelation of God's will than had Abraham at that time. Jacob was responsible to respond to the will of God as it had been revealed to him. The parallel in our day and time is easy to see; a believer is required to seek out and respond to the revealed will of God and not to be content to continue in the traditions of men or in something which appeals to him.

The altar he erected may well have proved a testimony to the people of Shechem who, from time to time, would no doubt see Jacob offering sacrifices. Sadly, however, the altar was in the wrong place. It should have been in Bethel, the place of God's choice, the house of God, for He had told Jacob "I am the God of Bethel" (Gen. 31: 13). So, today, we have believers who seek to raise a testimony to God in a decadent world but fail to appreciate the teaching of Scripture that the testimony should be, in the collective aspect, related to the place of God's choice, His spiritual house and with His people.

The close proximity of Jacob's tent to Shechem (Gen. 33: 18) no doubt helped Dinah to fulfil her desire to "see the daughters of the land" (34: 1). As a girl among so many brothers her wish seems natural enough, but it was fraught with danger and led to disastrous consequences. These were not limited to the immediate time, but had repercussions in Jacob's death-bed blessings (Gen. 49: 5-7), and in the blessings of Moses where Simeon is excluded. A false, or

even unwise, step can lead not only to the fall of the person concerned but to the detriment or even spiritual ruin of others.

R. Hickling

COMMENTS

1. (**Birkenhead**): This is very sound. Separation always comes before testimony or witness-bearing. Testimony is the purpose of separation. So it has been from the beginning when God separated light from darkness calling the former Day and the latter Night. Having made this separation He placed light-bearer in both Day and Night (Gen. 1: 4, 14-19) so that "the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge" (Ps. 19: 1-2).

2. (Cowdenbeath **and Galston**): It would appear that it was in order for the patriarchs to buy land to house their dead bodies, but not to house their living bodies (Gen. 23; Josh. 24: 32).

3. (Cowdenbeath): Friends in Cowdenbeath have painted a fine picture of Jacob's separated community. It was indeed the divine plan that it should foreshadow the encampment of Israel, but the encampment of Israel had what Jacob's encampment at Shechem did not have. The encampment of Israel was always set up in the place of God's choice, the place where He chose to rest and call by His Name. In Jacob's day that place was Bethel. Fine though Jacob's dispositions were, and similar to Israel's in a later day they might have been, but they were, alas, in the wrong place.

4. (Galston): Given the sons' capacity for conspiracy revealed in later scriptures (e.g. Gen. 37), it is more honouring to Jacob (in the absence of scriptures to the contrary) to assume that the sons carried out their schemes behind his back.

/ . E. P

5. (**Galston**): We must realize that moral standards in Shechem would be far below the standards practised in the encampment of Jacob. Apparently neither Hamor nor Shechem felt the need to express regret for what had taken place. Contributors have rightly pointed out that the moral standards in the world around us are low, but we must maintain the high standards required by the word of God. The separation that the Scripture enjoins upon us is for our good.

J. K. D. J.

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Bible Studies

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EDITORIAL

8309

Jacob's return to Bethel **was an occasion on which he would review God's faithfulness to him over many years.** Last time he **had been there he had been** comparatively young, **single and alone, fleeing from his brother.** At that time **an impression had been made on him of the majesty and holiness of God - "How dreadful is this place!"** (Gen. 28: 17). God **had reiterated to him the promises made to Abraham and Isaac and he in turn had vowed that if God would be with him,** the Lord would **be his God, he would recognize Bethel as God's house, and he would give a tenth of his income to God.** When he returned he was old (although he **still had some eventful years to live) with eleven sons and some daughters, a large household and great wealth.** Nonetheless he knew that **in the sight of the holy God whom he was to worship at Bethel all this was nothing: holiness was needed, and he had the members of his household purify themselves.** Perhaps he was conscious that he **had been lax in permitting idols in his household which would, of course, include many servants as well as members of his family.** As soon as he arrived at Bethel he worshipped **and dedicated the place to the God of the house of God.**

God, for **His part, again repeated the promises given to Abraham and Isaac and reminded Jacob of his earlier experience when he had striven with God and obtained a blessing (Gen. 32: 24-29).** The house of God is not only **the place where men can worship God, but it is also the place where God displays His covenant grace.** It seems strange that **after the revelation of God Almighty, Jacob left Bethel, probably after only a short time, and as far as we know never returned there.** Furthermore, although **men went to worship at Bethel in the time of Samuel (1 Sam. 10: 3), no house of God was built there in later times, and Bethel was chiefly noted for heathen altars (1 Kin. 12: 29, Amos 4: 4).** Perhaps we should learn from this how **easy it is for men to turn the house of God into a house for something of their own devising.**

P. L. H.

THE ATONEMENT (continued)

A theory of the Atonement: what is its purpose?

The object of a theory of the Atonement is to explain how the work of Christ achieved its end of the justification of men. The explanation can only be given on the basis of the information provided by Scripture, and it must therefore use scriptural concepts and statements. It might be objected that the construction of a theory is pointless philosophizing, since Scripture states that Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15: 3), and all we have to do is to believe this. Two points might be made in reply: first, that the search for the truth is valuable for its own sake, and should be pursued to the extent that revelation permits; and second, that incorrect ideas about the nature of the Atonement have led to errors in the presentation of the gospel which make it powerless. For example, someone who was taught that Christ's suffering was merely an example to us to suffer in opposing evil might never appreciate the fact of God's wrath against sin, and hence never look for a Saviour from it. For these reasons it is worthwhile to construct a theory of the Atonement which will summarize the scriptural teaching on the subject.

Scriptural representations of the Atonement

In constructing a theory of the Atonement, it is useful first to collect and classify the scriptural references to it, because Scripture reveals different aspects which must be covered by the theory.

The work of Christ is represented as:

(i) *A ransom, or redemption price*

^M"The Son of Man came... to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20: 28; Mark 10: 45).

"Who gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2: 6).

The ransom is the price paid for deliverance from the bondage of sin. A similar thought is expressed in the scriptures dealing with redemption, which is a buying back to God by the payment of a price. Examples are:

"Christ **redeemed us** from the **curse** of the **law**" (Gal. 3: 13).

"God **sent forth His Son**... born **under** the **law**, that **he** might **redeem** them which **were under** the **law**" (Gal. 4: 5).

In both of these cases the Greek word used is *exagorazo*, which means "to acquire out of the forum", using the simile of the slave-market. A different word, Gk. *lutroo*, is used in the expressions "Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all Iniquity" (Tit. 2: 14) and "Ye were redeemed... with precious blood" (1 Pet. 2: 18, 19). The noun corresponding to this, Gk. *lutron*, is that translated "ransom" in the passages cited above.

(ii) *The suffering of a penalty*

"Who **was delivered up** for our **trespasses**" (Rom. 4: 25);

"God... condemned **sin In** the **flesh**" (Rom. 8: 3);

"Christ **redeemed us** from the **curse** of the **law**, **having** become **a curse** for **us**" (Gal. 3: 13).

The justice **and** holiness of God, **expressed in** His law for **mankind demands** a penalty from those who **break** the law, which penalty was **suffered by** Christ.

(iii) *An act of obedience*

"Through the obedience of one **shall the many be made** righteous" (Rom. 5: 19).

"Becoming obedient **even** unto **death**" (Phil. 2: 8).

In submitting to the will of God, Christ, **as** the last **Adam**, was obedient where **Adam had been** disobedient, **and** this obedience affected the **race** of which Christ **is** **head**, **as** **Adam's** disobedience affected **his** posterity,

(iv) *A sin offering*

The New Testament draws frequently on the **Imagery** of the **Old** Testament offerings, which foreshadowed the **sacrifice** of Christ. John **referred** to the Lord **as** "the Lamb of God, **which** taketh **away** the sin of the world" (John 1: 29), **and** Heb. 9 contrasts "the blood of goats **and** calves" **with** the "blood of Christ who through **the** eternal Spirit offered Himself without **blemish** unto God". **Summarizing** the **sacrificial** provisions of the Law, the **writer** to the Hebrews **says** "According to the **law**, **I** **may** almost **say**, **all** things **are** **cleansed** by blood, **and** apart from the **shedding** of blood there is no remission (9: 22)

(To be continued)

P. L. Hickling

THE HOUSE OF GOD, ITS ALTAR AND WORSHIPPERS (Gen. 35: 1-29)

From Birkenhead: The command to Jacob to go and dwell at Bethel came to him at a time when he was shamed before those who did not share his beliefs in God. The instruction involved identification of God as the One who had appeared to Jacob at another time in his life when, having fled from his brother, he was going through a time of difficulty. With this background he is told to return to the place where the vision of God had first been granted and where such a deep impression had been made on him. It was clearly stated that he was to arise, go and build an altar.

Verses 2 and 3 of this chapter serve to elaborate verse 1 as they clearly show the different aspects of Jacob's approach, revealing in increasing detail the necessary preparations which were to be made, and hence the importance of the place which was his destination.

Before he could "go" to "the" place, Jacob and his household were to set aside the strange gods and purify and dedicate themselves. He was to make his way to "the" place where God had appeared, where Jacob had declared the place to be - the "house of God", the "gate of heaven" (Gen. 28: 16, 17).

We were able to find parallels with the believer today who must hear the call of God, present himself to be built into the house of God (1 Pet. 2: 4, 5) and prepare himself for entry into the presence of God for worship (1 Cor. 11: 28).

The preparation of an altar suggests service and worship, and we were able to discuss holy priesthood service today, having seen that Jacob was to present his worship at the "gate of heaven".

In the light of God's clear instruction that Jacob should return to Bethel for a specific reason, we found the following scriptures relevant:

1 Kin. 8: 27, Ex. 25: 8, Eph. 2: 20, 21, 1 Tim. 3: 15 and 1 Pet. 2: 1-5.

The promises of blessing and inheritance which were made to Abraham and Isaac were renewed to Jacob and as a consequence of the experience which he had, he was deeply moved and caused to render an offering to the Lord.

Much of our discussion centred around **the** action of Jacob **in** moving on from Bethel **again** after a period estimated **as 17 years**. We were unable to determine whether this was contrary to **the** Lord's instruction to dwell there **and**, linked **with this**, we were cautious **in** attributing subsequent events which **caused distress in his** life to **the** actions of God **in** disciplining **him**. If, however, the **significance** of the place **and** the **meaning** of the **name** given to it **by** Jacob when **he** **received** the vision **are** vital to **reaching** a right conclusion, **then** **maybe** **he** should not **have returned** to **his father's** house [Comment 1],

R. C. Halpin, R. D. Williams

From Cowdenbeath: "Unto **Thee, O Lord**, belongeth **mercy**" (Ps. 62: 12). The truth of those words **is evidenced here**, firstly **in** God's intervention on Jacob's **behalf** at a **time of real crisis in** order to **deliver him** from possible **reprisals by** the inhabitants of the **land**. Secondly, however, **in a more surprising manner in** that He **gave** instructions for the sons of Jacob, who **had been** guilty of **very** wicked conduct, to go **up** to Bethel, to **the** house of God [Comment 2], God does not **and** cannot overlook **sin**, **but He mercifully** forgives. This **is seen to be so in a remarkable way in** New Testament times. **He did** not choose the finest specimens of **humanity to be in** the **churches** of God **and** therefore **in** the house of God. The witness **is** that **in** Corinth (see 1 Cor. 6: 9-11) **and** **Ephesus** (see **Eph.** 2: 3) **and in** various **churches** elsewhere (see Titus 3: 3) **men and** women who **had indulged in all** known forms of **sin were washed, sanctified and** justified by faith **in** the atoning work of Christ (1 Cor. 6: 11) **and so made** fit to worship God **in His** house.

In addition to our **being made** perfect through the **sacrifice** of Christ (**Heb.** 10: 14) responsibility **is laid** upon **us** that before **appearing** before a holy God **in** worship **we should be careful to see that we are in a fit** condition to do so. This involves putting away **things** that would constitute idols **in** our **lives**. It **requires** also the **need for daily cleansing**. **Our bodies have been washed with pure water** (**Heb.** 10: 22), a work done for **us** by Christ, but **there is** the **need for the washing** of the **hands and the feet** before **engaging** in the **service** of the sanctuary, **as in** the case of the priests of the Tabernacle (**Ex. 30: 20, 21**). The **changing** of the garments **may speak** of a change of habits. The worshipper must **be seen to be a** different sort of person from **what he had** previously been. Jacob, who **had had** the **experience** of having been at Bethel could **well recall** the **feeling of awe which** overwhelmed **him as he realised** that

he was in a place where God was. Because of this he gave instructions for such preparation before going up to Bethel.

There he built an altar in order, no doubt, that he might offer sacrifices unto God. Associated with the spiritual house today there is an altar. "We (i. e. we who are the house of God) (Heb. 3: 6), have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the Tabernacle" (Heb. 13: 10) [Comment 3], Although the chief function of the holy priesthood is to offer spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet. 2: 5), there is the additional privilege of having communion with the altar (1 Cor. 10: 18). This is clearly a reference to the Peace Offering. Whilst God got His portion through the fat burned upon the altar, the priests and the offerer ate of the flesh. It is our privilege on the Lord's Day morning, when we are before God in worship, to share a sweet communion with Him in Christ.

God appeared a second time to Jacob at Bethel. He not only heard God speak to him, but was assured of His presence in the place. With a renewal of the promises regarding the nation and the land Jacob made clear his intention and desire to serve God in the place of His choice. He set up again a pillar of witness. He signified his personal dedication to service by pouring out a drink offering and he sanctified it by the pouring of the oil. Yet it is clear that Jacob did not stay long at Bethel. Why he left we are not told, but such a decision could not have been justified. Following his departure, and perhaps as a consequence of so doing, various calamities overtook him beginning with the death of his beloved Rachel.

J. Bowman

From Derby: Jacob came to Shechem and was content to dwell there. He built an altar and gave it a high-sounding name, but it was not in God's purpose for him to settle there. God had told Jacob that He was the God of Bethel. The place was associated with God's name and His purpose for Jacob. It means "house of God" and it is in association with the house of God that there is the altar of God. When Jacob built the altar at Shechem he was out of God's purpose. At Bethel God was revealed and He revealed Himself.

Much later in Psalm 27 David said, "One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house

of the Lord all the days of my life...". David had the vision of the house of God and it was his one consuming desire to be associated with it. God intended this for Jacob, but he had to deal with him once more at Shechem, and then Jacob was on the move again, and this time in the right direction. We in our day should move only under the guidance of God. The fact that the altar was associated with the house of God came out clearly with Jacob's descendants. There was to be one altar when they came to the land of Canaan and all the rest were to be destroyed.

The writer to the Hebrews says, ^M"We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the Tabernacle" (Heb. 13: 10) [Comment 3]. We also have a high priest and we have the privilege and responsibility of offering a sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise.

Jacob told all those associated with him that they must purify themselves before they reached Bethel. We must realise the seriousness of this. A cleansing process must take place in our lives. He also told them to change their garments and this refers to the changing of one's habits. Peter says, "Putting away therefore all wickedness, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings... ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house... " (1 Pet. 2: 1-5). As such we cannot say or do or go where we like. We must be in subjection to God's will.

G. W. Conway

From Galston: *"Go up to Bethel"*. "Let us go unto the house of the Lord... whither the tribes go up" (Ps. 122) and "And many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob" (Is. 2: 3). To the house of God is always an upward way - "the upward calling of God" (Phil. 3: 14 RVM).

"Dwell there". The blessing is not in a visit, but in dwelling there, in taking time to sit down there and review God's goodness, to listen to God speaking.

"Make there an altar". The place of sacrifices to God is associated with the house and it is also the place of worship. The work of Christ on the cross is essential to the service of the house of God. That Jacob appreciated these privileges is seen in his response.

"Put away the strange gods that are among you". ^MThou shalt worship the Lord **thy** God, **and Him** only **shalt** thou **serve**" (Luke 4: 8). Worshipers with **divided** hearts **are** unacceptable.

"Purify yourselves". Practices incompatible with the service of God must **be** given **up**.

"Change your garments". **The service** of God **in the** house of God must not **be** treated **as** common, **but** venerated **as** a **high** privilege. This scripture alone is sufficient to **teach us** that we should not come before God **casually dressed**. **Our service in the** house of God should **never be casual** or slipshod **but** our best [Comment 4].

Jacob **hid all** the strange gods **and** the **ear-rings** under the oak. We too **must leave** the world's **ideas and practices behind us** when we come to God's house.

"There God **was revealed to him**" (v. 7) - "**One** thing **have I asked** of the Lord, that **will I seek** after, that I **may dwell in the** house of **the** Lord **all the days of my life**, to behold the beauty of the Lord, **and to inquire in** (or consider) **His temple**" (Ps. 27). There God spoke with **him** (v. 15). We too can **say** that **in the** house of God, God **has been revealed to us and** there we **have heard Him speak** to us.

Busy Deborah **died** at Bethel. **She** could not **have died** at a better place. To **be in** the house of God when **the** time of departure comes **is a great privilege** [Comment 6].

In vv. **10-12** Israel **is** given **assurance** of the **will** of God.

V. 14 - **The** house of God **is** not to **be hidden but** should **be like** a city set on a **hill** that cannot **be** hid.

J. H. Johnson

From Liverpool: *The House of God*: God **reminds** Jacob of **his** vow **at** Bethel some **years** before (**Gen. 28: 22**). **Had** Jacob forgotten about **his** great **experience**? He **has** not mentioned the God of the house of God **since** ch. 28. **Anyway**, Jacob was taken **back** to **where he was** when he was **fleeing** from **his** brother.

- Some questions:
- a) **Was** it exactly the **same** place? Probably.
 - b) **In** the desert or **in the** city? Probably **in** the **barren** land outside Luz.
 - c) Was it a "real" house? Probably not - **just** the place chosen **by** God **and marked** for meeting.
 - d) Should **he have** stayed **there**? Probably not - they **were** nomadic people **and had** to move [Comment 1].

Whatever the details, God wanted Jacob **and his** people (as **His** people) to meet Him **at** His house, so **he helped them on their** way.

For **his** part Jacob **had** the good **desire** to **be in** God's house - **like many** after **him** - **and** knew also that holiness becomes God's house, therefore:

No idols

Each must **put** God first

Wash **and scrub**, **and** smart new clothes to show **a change** of heart; **a cleaned** conscience before God. Remember the blood on **the hands** of Simeon **and** Levi (34: 25-29).

We **each** know our **daily and weekly need** to present ourselves to God **as we** ought; the **experience** of 1 **Peter 2**,

The Altar: This always **has** the **chief place in** the house of God **as** it speaks of Christ. **An altar is a place** of offering. God appointed only one altar **at a** time. It was **said** that Christ is our altar today - though no scriptures to support this directly were quoted - (a process of elimination **being** favoured) [Comment 5].

Worshippers: The death of Deborah shows that faithful **service** of God **is** no inoculation against **weeping and** sorrow - after **all**, **why** should it **be**?

God **revealed** Himself as **El Shaddai** - God **All-sufficient** (v. 11) with the twin promises of the people of God - the offspring of the **land** [Comment 7].

In praise and appreciation Jacob pours out the drink offering on the pillar. The act is the outward expression of worship, joy and communion, as is our sharing in the cup and the thanksgivings.

The "real" praise is the attitude of heart and soul - bowed in wonder, love and obedience. Obedience is a sure sign of a real appreciation of the Almighty.

A. G. Davies, D. J. Webster

From Nottingham: Chapter 35 contains three communions with God and three deaths. God ordered Jacob to Bethel (v.1), then in v. 3 Jacob built an altar and God endorsed Jacob's new name (v.10). Then follow the deaths of Deborah, Rachel and Isaac. It is interesting to note that it is God who reminds Jacob of the vows which he made (chapters 28 and 31) when Jacob was in trouble and keen to remind God of His promises to him.

It would seem incredible that Jacob had been sojourning in the land of Canaan for about seven to eight years before he decided to return to Bethel, as this should have been the place of his desire because the house of God is the place of the altar and there is no substitution for His worship [Comment 1]. Jacob now dwelt in Bethel with his family and servants rather than as an individual and in many cases today it can be seen how that one person has been the cause of many forming part of God's house.

The "purifying of yourselves" referred to in v.2 would be a cleansing of heart in the spiritual sense, whereas the changing of clothes would be a purifying of oneself on the outside, e.g. habits and entertainments. The putting away of foreign gods would be towards the exclusive devotion to God in the house of God, but we were not clear however of the significance of the removing the earrings.

As Jacob was undertaking his journey fear fell upon the surrounding towns and no-one would pursue him. This should remind us that the way of duty to God is the safe and narrow way.

In the re-naming of Bethel to El-bethel, the God of the house of God, we seem to have introduced a grander name as it points the heart to the God of the house with all the privileges and responsibilities associated with it. We must never lose sight of

the greatness of the God of the house and allow our attitude to sink to one of mere formality, Jacob's biggest downfall would appear to be that he did not dwell (remain) at Bethel and by moving away brought on his greatest trouble. Deborah had great satisfaction in that she died in the place of the house of God. It was noticed that Deborah, Rachel and Leah are the first women mentioned as being in the house of God and we can draw parallels from their lives with those of some of our women today.

K. S. Hickling

COMMENTS

1. (Birkenhead **and** others): Several contributors have considered whether Jacob should have left Bethel, and most have concluded that he should not. He certainly had a command from God to dwell there (Gen. 35: 1) and no recorded commandment to go anywhere else. However, in defending the conduct of Jacob at earlier stages in his life, fellow-editors have pointed to the absence of divine condemnation and have concluded that we should not condemn where God does not do so. The case is similar here: there is no hint of disapproval of Jacob for returning to his father; indeed, God had said to Jacob "Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee" (Gen. 31: 3). We know that men should not leave the house of God today, but are we justified in arguing backwards to Jacob's situation and declaring that he should have stayed in the same physical location? In the absence of scriptural comment perhaps we should be wary of doing so.

Birkenhead friends suggest that Jacob's stay at Bethel might be about 17 years. It would be interesting to know how this estimate was arrived at. I would think that the period could not be anything like so long. The birth of Joseph is recorded in Gen. 30: 23, and it was immediately after this that Jacob first sought to leave Laban (30: 25). There followed a period of tending Laban's flocks, when Jacob had the marked sheep (30: 31-43), which must have extended over a number of years, for Jacob to acquire "large flocks" (v.43). After this came the meeting with Esau and a period of living in Shechem, before Jacob came to Bethel. He then went to Isaac at Mamre, and Isaac died. After all these events when Jacob was living in the land of Canaan, Joseph was seventeen years old (Gen. 37: 2). I would therefore think that Jacob's stay at Bethel was quite short, sufficient to commune with God and

worship **Him**, before **he** passed on. **Gen. 35: 16** certainly gives the impression of a short intermission.

P. L. H.

In **B.S. 8302 J.K.D.J.** commented as follows, "there is no **specific** condemnation **given in** the Scriptures of Jacob's actions **in securing the blessing from his father but** we cannot justify **his lies and deceit**" and then **applied** the scripture in Galatians **6: 7**. A distinction was thus **made between** God's **teaching us by precept and** His teaching of **us by example** (see also Acts **1: 1; 2 Tim. 3: 10**). The evaluation of Jacob's conduct was **based on the example of his later experiences at the hands of Laban and his own sons**. **Similarly we** observe the **example** of disaster after disaster **which followed his departure from Bethel (Gen. 35: 16), and learn that when God said dwell He did not mean visit**. How is this directive to be reconciled with the instruction to return to **his kindred (Gen. 31: 3)**? We must conclude that **Genesis 35: 1 supersedes Genesis 31: 3 in the sense that Isaac should have followed the example of the lowly Deborah, who detached herself from Isaac's household and joined herself to those who rose up to dwell at Bethel. There she gained eternal renown as the first woman named in the Scriptures in association with the house of God, where she finished her days.**

In addition to the **example** of the **narrative**, however, **we have** to consider the revelation of God to Jacob. **He had been advanced in the knowledge of God beyond what had been given to Abraham and Isaac for it had been revealed to him that God dwelt in a particular place in the land, and that He still dwelt there after the long years of Jacob's absence.** Thus **he went up to Bethel and therefore, leaving it, he went down.** But more than this, in the portion **under study this month, it is also revealed that the house of God is the place of the altar.** Thus Jacob could no more **build an altar at any other place within the land than could Abraham build an altar in any other land.** **Indeed, if Jacob was correct in departing from Bethel, then he is the only man in history who, having had revealed to him the truth that the house of God is the place of the altar, was then free to build an altar in a place of his own choosing.**

Finally, it is **clear from Genesis 37 that Jacob had a semi-permanent abode from which his sons travelled to and fro to find pasture for his enormous flocks.** Thus, just as **God had a place of resting down so had Jacob.** **Alas they were not the same place!**

In these things we can hardly fail to see the seeds of truths more fully developed in later scriptures.

As to the length of time spent at Bethel, we can narrow this down since at Shechem, Joseph, who was almost the same age as Dinah, would have been at least an early teenager but was 17 years old by the time of the events recorded in Genesis 37.

I. E. P.

I share the view taken by many of our contributors that Jacob was wrong in leaving Bethel. Fellow-editors have drawn attention to the instruction given to Jacob to go to Bethel and *dwell* there and also to the absence in the record of an instruction to move on. Due weight should be given to this. It is true that there is no specific recorded condemnation of Jacob's move, and the sorrows experienced in life are not always the consequences of disobedience, but there seems to be a significance in the way the scriptural record relates the sorrows that Jacob experienced after leaving Bethel. Men are expected to live in the light of the revelation they have received, and God had given Jacob a special revelation with regard to Bethel.

J. K. D. J.

2. (Cowdenbeath): The instruction was specifically given to Jacob, not his sons, although of course he took them with him.

3. (Cowdenbeath **and** Derby): Heb. 13: 10 presents some difficulties of interpretation and it is not certain that it can be applied in the way that these two papers have used it. The verse must be considered in its context.

One exposition connects the "eating" of v. 10 with the "meats" of v. 9, and identifies those who "occupied themselves" with meats with those who "serve the Tabernacle", i. e. the sanctuary of the Old Covenant. In contrast we have our portion from our altar, from which they have no right to eat (see Notes on the Epistle to the Hebrews, J. Miller, for an expression of this view). However, it is difficult to reconcile such an explanation with the next verse, connected by the conjunction "for", indicating the reason for the preceding statement. (Note that the NIV, favouring the above explanation at least by implication, omits the "for", which does appear in the Greek text). Verse 11 refers to the sin offering on

the **Day** of Atonement, when **the High Priest** made atonement for **his** own **sins** and the **sins** of **the** people, **taking** the blood of the bullock and the goat into the holy **place** (Lev. 16: 18) and **having** their bodies taken out to **be burned** (Lev. 16: 27), No-one under the **Old Covenant** had a right to partake of this **sacrifice**, but God alone. **Verse 10** therefore cannot **be** saying that they **eat** from **their** altar and **we** from ours, **since** the **sacrifice** specifically chosen is one from **which** they **did** not **have** the right to eat.

An alternative explanation is that the **passage** is warning the **reader** not to **be carried by** doctrines **which** are "strange" (Gk. *xenos*), that is incompatible with **Christian teaching** and which involve **sacrificial meals**. The writer uses the **Old Testament** institutions illustratively: **we have a spiritual altar** from **which** those who **serve the spiritual** Tabernacle **have no right to eat**. The point **being made** is that in connection with **the Christian sacrifice** there is no **sacrificial meal**, and those who followed Christ would **have to endure** the reproach of **their Jewish acquaintances** when they **failed** to bring **physical sacrifices**. Instead, **they** would offer **sacrifices of praise** (Heb. 13: 15).

Readers might **care** to consider the **matter themselves**, and offer some observations.

P. L. H.

It is true that **Hebrews 13: 10** is not **literally** connected to **Hebrews 13: 11**, but it is directly connected to it **by** its doctrine and that of the **succeeding verses**. The point of **Hebrews 13: 11** is not that the **priests were** not to eat of those **sacrifices**, but that those **were the very sacrifices that enabled** the collective people (and **their** representatives) to **be accepted** and eventually partake of those offerings to **which they were entitled**. Thus **the prime point made in Hebrews 13: 11** lies not in the **eating** but in the application of the blood on **behalf** of the people **as summed up in the adage**, "the **farther** in you go, the **farther** out you **have to go**", for, "the bodies of those beasts... **are burned** without **the camp**". In order to go into the sanctuary today, the people must first **separate themselves** from those companies in which **Christ is rejected** as Lord. In the case of those to whom the **Hebrew epistle** was written, **such** companies **were**, in the main, those who attempted **divine service** after the order of **the first** Tabernacle. Hence **Hebrews 12: 17** does not

say, "let us go into God bearing His reproach" as is the conclusion of the alternative explanation cited by our fellow-editor but, "let us go forth unto Him without the camp". Thus in setting forth the sequence of separation, followed by service at the altar associated with the house of God, Genesis 37: 1-15 shows, in that embryonic way so characteristic of the book of Genesis, divine truth which is elaborated in such later scriptures as Hebrews 13:7-17.

I. E. P.

4. (Galston): The changing of the garments was an outward sign of the purification. We do not enter physically into God's presence, but enter the holy place spiritually, clothed in a righteousness which is the result of the Spirit's work in us (Rev. 3: 4, 5). The clothing of our bodies is of relatively little importance, provided that it is decent and not offensive to others. Opinions as to what is "casual" vary considerably, and there is no need for us to impose our own preferences on others in this matter, assuming that there is no deliberate intention to be shocking. It is of course true, as Galston friends say, that our service must not be "casual" in the sense of "careless".

P. L. H.

The general teaching about clothing in the Scriptures may be condensed into the adage, "clothes conceal and clothes reveal". Our fellow-editor underlines the first aspect in saying that clothes should be decent and not offensive. The second aspect is seen in Genesis 35: 2 where the Hebrew word *simplah* indicates a covering that assumes the shape of the object underneath. This significance is well seen in Deut. 22: 5. The New Testament application of Gen. 35: 2 is indicated by friends in Nottingham. The disciple today should be aware that his clothes may reveal his inner attitudes towards those before whom he appears, "clothed and in his right mind", be they God or men.

I. E. P.

5. (Liverpool): I find some difficulty in seeing that the altar speaks of Christ. The New Testament scriptures clearly indicate that He fulfils the shadows of the sacrifices of the Old Testament, and that He has an office as High Priest. We know that He, through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself to God (Heb. 9: 14), so we can understand the combination of those two, but it is difficult to see what the significance would be of Christ as the altar as well. The sacrifice of Christ has been offered once for all - does the cross correspond to the

altar for **that** offering? As to our offerings before God, **is** not our altar **the altar of the heavenly sanctuary, of which the** earthly one was only a copy (Heb. 9: 23)?

P. L. H.

The altar does not **speak** of the cross of wood for **the scripture** says "**we have an altar**" (Heb. 13: 10). The **altar** of **burnt** offering is called "**the table of the Lord**" **and** what was **laid on it is called "my food" and "the bread of God"** (Lev. 21: 6; Num. **28: 2**; Mal. 1: 7, 12). The altar for the **believer** today (**1 Cor. 10: 14-21; Heb. 13: 10**) is the counterpart of that altar **since** these scriptures **deal** with eating **off** an altar, **whereas** there was no eating **off** the golden altar of **incense**. It is **hard** to **imagine** a more intimate association than that of **the** offering **and** the altar. **An essential feature of an offering is that** it-is something that **is** brought **and** therefore **demand**s a place to **which** it may be brought. This intimate relationship is **clearly seen in the title given to the** copper altar of the Tabernacle: the **altar** of burnt-offering. **Thus if Christ be** the offering **He can scarce be other than** the altar. **In the** union of offering and altar, **as** typified **in** the Tabernacle, **we have** portrayed Christ **slain and** wholly offered **up in the** offering. **In the permanence,** on **the other hand,** of the altar with its **acacia wood and** copper **is** depicted the ability of the Son of **Man** simultaneously to **endure** the **divine** judgement **fire**.

I. E. P.

6. (Galston): The **death** of Deborah foreshadows the great truth **appreciated by the man after** God's heart **and** uttered **in such** scriptures as **Psalms 23: 6 and 27: 4**. It should **be the** ambition of **all disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ to be found in** the house of God **at the end** of their earthly **pilgrimage** whether it **be ended by death or by the** coming of **the** Lord.

7. (Liverpool): Friends **in** Liverpool **have** pin-pointed **an** important truth. The **name El-Shaddai is** associated **here** (Gen. 35: 11) with nations **and** kings, foreshadowing the **fact** that **the** house of God **is the** centre of **divine rule**. This was subsequently **seen in** God's **calling** of the holy nation that was **Israel to service** at the **altar** built **in the place of the Name**. It is **similarly seen in churches** of God today. **In the Millennium all nations will go up to the place of the Name to render** **divine service** (**Zech. 14: 16-21**). *I E P*

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Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8310

When the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God, saying ^MBlessed is the King that cometh in the name of the Lord", some of the Pharisees said, "Master, rebuke Thy disciples". But He answered, "I tell you that if these shall hold their peace, the stones will cry out" (Luke 19: 37-40). Although Joseph was rebuked by his father after recounting the dream concerning the sun and moon and the eleven stars (Gen. 37: 10), his father kept the saying in mind, and his rebuke was not destructive. It may be that Israel discerned in his son Joseph the awakening of a divine purpose in him. In the fruition of that purpose we see that Joseph reflected, if only in a small measure, God's intent when he made man in His own image, and blessed him, commanding him to be fruitful and to have dominion over the works of His hands. When David contemplated the Lord as King (Ps. 22: 28-29) he wrote, "All they that go down to the dust shall bow before Him".

In Joseph's sheaf which "arose, and also stood upright" there was an intimation that one day his brethren would look to him when the world had no bread for them; and he whom they supposed that death had reaped would stand again in their midst when famine spelt death to them.

Yet his brethren envied him. Even before hearing the dreams, when they saw how Israel loved him, "they could not speak peaceably unto him". Luke records how the Lord lamented over Jerusalem, and "when He drew nigh He saw the city and wept over it, saying, O that thou hadst known in this day, even thou, the things which belong unto peace " (Luke 19: 41-42 RVM). His own nation did not acknowledge that "the Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand" (John 3: 35), Before they could be "the righteous nation that keepeth truth" (Is. 26: 2) they must confess like the Psalmist, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep" (Ps. 119: 176).

Joseph said, "I seek my brethren". His brothers had moved away from where they originally went 'to feed their father's flock', and were in a place of pits (Gen. 37: 20). Before Joseph came near to them they conspired against him to slay him. "There are many devices in a man's heart", says the proverb, "But the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand" (Prov. 19: 21). Such self-seeking on the part of his brothers contrasted with Joseph's obedience and his concern for them and for his father's flock, but the Lord saw to it that their evil plan was overturned.

Nevertheless, Joseph's pathway was beset by suffering, yet his trust in God was constant. Let us imitate his faith, considering the issue of his life, and the lives of men like him in our own day who have tended the flock of God.

We can scarcely imagine the despair which must have overwhelmed Joseph as his brethren took him and cast him into the pit. But it is completely beyond our powers to fathom the experience of our Lord foretold in the prophetic Psalm, "Be not far from Me; for trouble is near; For there is none to help" (Ps. 22: 11).

Yet what a purpose of grace there was in those words, "I will declare Thy Name unto My brethren" (Ps. 22: 22)'. Joseph's brethren were yet to hear the words from his own mouth, "God meant it for good... I will nourish you, and your little ones" (Gen. 50: 20-21). Here was a heart that truly cared for them.

The apostle Paul, having set before the Philippians the mind which was in Christ Jesus, then said concerning Timothy, "For I have no man likeminded, who will care truly for your state. For they all seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a child serveth a father, so he served with me in furtherance of the gospel" (Phil. 2: 20-22).

Like Joseph, Timothy had a caring heart. David, who himself knew what it was to be a shepherd of God's ancient people, could say "The Lord is my Shepherd". In our day the Chief Shepherd still cares for His own, a comfort, and at the same time a reminder of our responsibility in turn toward our own brethren in the Lord.

E. A.

CORRESPONDENCE

From J. H. Johnson, Galston.

With reference to the article in August Bible Studies (8308) "The Scriptural Doctrine of Atonement", and quoting from page 119 "Propitiation can be defined as 'the removal of wrath by the offering of a gift', and the most well known occurrence of the term is, of course, Rom. 3: 24-26."

This definition cannot be applied to the scriptural use of the term. This was the view of the ancient Greeks who believed that when the gods were offended they could be placated by offering them a gift or gifts. It is not the meaning of the term in the Scriptures. In Romans 3: 24-26 the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men was vented on Christ who bore our sins in His body and who thereby made expiation for sins (i. e. He satisfied the demands of divine righteousness because of our sins). God's wrath against our sins is removed because it was expressed or poured out on Christ. It is not removed because God accepted a gift.

Reply

It is true that the act of propitiation is not mere appeasement or "buying-off", as has been noted in comment 11 of B. S. 8307 (p. 114), and brother Johnson's remarks on the satisfaction of the divine righteousness are quite correct. However, there are many facets of the work of Christ, and one cannot exclude the sacrificial aspect of His death. Scripture refers to "the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish unto God" (Heb. 9: 14), and says that He "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9: 26). In both Hebrew and Greek, the word for a sacrifice signified a slaughtered animal, which the offerer gave to God to avert the wrath of God, and make himself acceptable. Ultimately, the sacrifice, even under the Old Covenant, was provided by God Himself (Lev. 17: 11), and this was true of the sacrifice of Christ. The nature of the sacrifice, involving the giving of a life, was such that it satisfied God's requirements. The dispute arises because I have used the term 'gift' to describe a sacrifice of this sort offered to God. The phrase in which it was used was put forward as a general definition, which will be made more specific in due course, but it would perhaps have been less open to misapprehension if I had used the term Sacrifice¹ instead of 'gift'¹ from the beginning.

P. L. H.

From Birkenhead: For the purpose of our study we understood Joseph to be a type of the Lord Jesus, but his behaviour could also be viewed as an example of the shepherd-care which an overseer should have for the assembly. We were conscious that there were limits to which we could go in the application of these types, and true understanding of the Scriptures was to be had from the correct interpretation of their meaning.

We were able to read that Joseph dwelt at home with his father, and it was pointed out that a godly man like Israel would have a positive effect on the upbringing of a young man, being used by God to guide him into correct ways of behaviour. His father loved Joseph more than the others, for the reason quoted in v. 3. Whether this constituted favouritism and was wrong is a matter for conjecture, but it is obvious that this preference was clear to his brothers and was quoted as the direct reason for their hatred [Comment 3]. It would seem that the sin of jealousy was common to them all.

However, we noted that whilst his brethren were active in their antagonism to Joseph, we do not read of him taking any reciprocal action. His attitude towards them at all times appeared to be constant and was showed up in his ready response to the words addressed by Israel to his son, "Go now, see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flock". This general instruction applied today would have many and varied specific applications in the assembly, and would need the unbiased and godly approach which Joseph employed in discharging his responsibilities.

One of the key points in our observation of Joseph's behaviour and attitude was the willingness which he showed; and the lack of antipathy and reluctance in his approach, whilst not remarked upon in the Scripture, is perhaps the more instructive because of this. The responsibility entrusted to him did not result in authoritative and overbearing behaviour, but in the faithful and persistent following of his brethren, so that he could discharge the responsibility placed upon him.

In applying the narrative to the churches of God, it would seem that the flock should beware of the failures displayed in this chapter. There should be no jealousy of the overseers because of their position, and a correct response to the approach of overseers discharging

their responsibilities is vital, as we are made fully aware in succeeding chapters of the keen watch which God was keeping on Joseph and on those who came into contact with him.

In our discussion we found a number of New Testament scriptures which had their parallel in Gen. 37. In Heb. 13: 17 we are told of the attitude required towards those who rule and also that those in such a position will give account to God. In 1 Pet. 5:3 the clear word to overseers is that they are not to lord it over the flock. Peter was told in John 21 to "feed" and "tend", whilst the Ephesian elders were to be similarly engaged (Acts 20). Overseers are required to be lovers of good, as well as "just, holy, temperate" (Titus 1: 8), traits beautifully portrayed in Joseph.

R. C. Halpin, A. Hyland

From Cowdenbeath: Joseph appears on the pages of Scripture in detail at Genesis 37. At the same time we must understand that, already, Joseph had witnessed weighty things. He must have heard of the wrestlings at Peniel. He was present as Esau met Jacob and no doubt witnessed the encounter. He saw the behaviour of his brothers in the matter of Shechem. He saw the passing of Deborah, Rachel and Isaac. Whatever the impressions of these events, undoubtedly Joseph seems to have been a young man whose roots spread deeply into the things of God. It was in this respect, we believe, that he brought the evil report about his brothers (v. 2). This was not tittle-tattle. He brought the report sadly and confidentially to where it ought to have come. He was jealous for the name of his father and his father's God. Divine revelation is generally committed to persons with spiritual depth (see 2 Tim. 2: 2). To Joseph were entrusted the dreams, and his faith was tested as he was put into the pit and subsequently sold into Egypt (Ps. 105: 19). He did not waver.

As to his care and devotion, we were impressed by his obedience to the spirit rather than the mere letter of his father's desire. When his brothers were not to be found in Shechem he enquired until he found them. He knew his father's concern for the welfare of family and flock and, as his father's emissary, he reflected that concern. So it ought to be with shepherds today.

Undoubtedly Jacob's sons were protecting the flock from wild animals and seeking out the best pasture. They knew Shechem's virtues in this respect although, on the spiritual plane, they must have realized that there were dangers associated with the place. Dothan was a place

of watering ("The place of two wells"), but it is possible that the wells were dry, for Joseph's pit was empty.

How it was possible for Jacob's sons to tend a flock with due care and sensitivity while harbouring such bitterness against their brother is difficult to comprehend [Comment 8], The lessons are obvious.

R. I. Shaw

From Derby: We read of Joseph tending the flock, when he was 17 years old with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. They were obviously not trustworthy shepherds as Joseph had to bring an "evil report" of them. He was favoured by his father and this made his brothers hate him. They did not like his dreams. God spoke directly to Jacob, but Joseph dreamed dreams.

At Jacob's request Joseph willingly undertook the long journey to Shechem to find his brothers and, when he discovered that they had moved on, he was undeterred and happily went the farther 12-20 miles to Dothan. Upon arrival he was hastily pushed into the bottle-shaped pit and, although he pleaded for mercy, his brothers would not listen [Comment 10].

Many things in Joseph's life resembled episodes in the Lord's life here on earth. He had a father who loved him and sent him to seek his brothers' welfare. His brethren plotted against him and were glad to sell him for twenty pieces of silver — that being the price of a male slave under twenty [Comment 11], Although he sank in the deep mire where there was no standing he became the lord and saviour of his brethren [Comment 1], He was in prison with two offenders, one of whom was raised to glory while the other was condemned. He was blameless and guiltless but he was wronged **many times** on the way to his eventual exaltation. He bore his brethren no malice for what they had done to him and was able to say, "Ye meant evil against me; but God meant it for good". He secured Goshen for them knowing it was necessary for them to dwell together in a separate unit so that they could be forged into a great nation.

In Luke 20: 9-16 the Lord Jesus told the parable of the vineyard. In it the workers said, "this is the heir; let us kill him". This applied to Joseph as well as to the Lord Jesus. They both had jealous brethren.

In v. 2 we read that Joseph was feeding his father's flock. The

Lord Jesus feeds His flock and helps it to grow. He stands between it and God. On the lakeside after the resurrection the Lord said to Peter, "Feed my lambs. . . . Feed my sheep".

Churches of God are spoken of as a flock. In 1 Pet. 5: 2 elders are exhorted to "tend the flock of God".

G. W. Conway

From Galston: Gen. 37: 2 "With his brethren". Tending the flock was work involving others; a fellowship in service (*cf* Lam. 3: 27, "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth"). "Was a lad with the sons of... ", i. e. he was in the same age-group as they were [Comment 2].

"*The evil report of them*". It was not *an* evil report. It was not one isolated incident but many, a series of incidents. It was their habit of life and it was probably adversely affecting the flock.

"*Unto their father*", it was not to Joseph's father, but to their father, to the one who was responsible for their instruction and correction. Even today in certain parts of this country it is common to inform a misbehaving child, "I'll tell your father". In this "reporting" Joseph's shepherd-care is seen not only for the sheep, but also for his brethren.

(Shechem was some 50 miles from Hebron and Dothan was about 15 miles further north of Shechem).

V. 13 "And *Israel* said". It was not Jacob. Israel is the spiritual man, the man of God. It indicates that Jacob was in the mind of God in sending Joseph not as to those who envied and hated him (and Jacob doubtless knew), but to his brethren.

"Here am I" indicates the ready, responsive spirit of obedience that characterized Joseph.

V. 14 "Out of... Hebron... to Shechem". Surely there is a glimpse here of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who left the Hebron of fellowship and communion with the Father to come to the Shechem of shouldering men's burdens ("Himself took our infirmities and bare our diseases"). "The Father sent the Son...".

"Behold, he was wandering in the field". It is evident from the

question and answer that follows that Joseph was not aimlessly wandering, but diligently searching.

V. 17 "Let us go to Dothan". His brethren had left the place of burdens to go to the place of feasting. (Young says the word means "double feasting". Bagster's Hebrew Lexicon says "Two wells"). Compare Neh. 3: 5 "but the nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord". They had moved from their appointed place of service to a place of their own choosing, a place pleasing to the flesh, a place of feasting [Comment 9],

"Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan". No doubt extremely tired, perhaps almost exhausted, he went on determined to do his father's will and to find his brethren.

V. 18 "They saw him afar off... they conspired against him". Cp. Mark 3: 6 and John 11: 53.

V. 20 "Let us slay him". Wherefore? Because their works were evil and their brothers righteous.

Verses 14-18 speak loudly to us of the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep.

J. H. Johnson

From Liverpool: *Joseph* - Naive, spoilt and provocative or open, honest and straightforward? That is the dilemma faced in interpreting this early part of Joseph's life. Jacob, apparently having learned nothing from his earlier disastrous favouritisms, [Comment 3] now singles out his second-youngest for special attention and demonstrates this by a very special coat, which, of course, increased the dislike of the rest of the family towards Joseph. Joseph is presented as not having helped the situation any. Do we have before us a "telltale" gloating in reporting his brothers¹ misdeeds to their father, or a godly man genuinely distressed at the ungodliness of his brothers? [Comment 7] In his brothers' eyes was he a godly rebuke or an irritating youngster? The dilemma is not easy to solve. In mitigation we would plead that the ten brothers had been brought up under the old Jacob - a schemer and opportunist, whereas Joseph was being reared under the new "Israel" and his closeness to God would inevitably rub off onto his favourite son [Comment 4].

Divine overruling - The task is further complicated by the fact that,

undoubtedly, Joseph is presented as a picture of the Lord Jesus. Joseph obviously did have his faults but, on the whole, the Holy Spirit has not seen fit to record them. Whether we can read this fact back into the narrative and infer that, therefore, all the facts recorded about his life will be of perfection is a debatable point. If we can do so then we have presented to us a young man telling in all innocence the dreams that God had given to him, the resulting jealousy and even Jacob's rebuke being out of step with the working of God [Comment 5]. What we can be certain of, however, is divine overruling in Joseph's life. It is not always easy to see the guiding hand of God when close-up to the situation and it is easy to become perturbed by a chain of events that seem out of control. Joseph may not have recognized as he was travelling enslaved towards Egypt the truth which he came to believe later that ^MYe meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50: 20).

Attitudes to sin - We were at a loss to understand the action of Jacob in sending out his favourite son to men whom he well knew to be violent, knowing their hatred of Joseph [Comment 6]₀. Some, seeing Joseph portrayed in the more favourable light outlined above, thought that he would probably point out the wrong before reporting it back to Jacob; and in so doing did what the Lord Jesus did to the Pharisees many years later, pointing out the holy character of God and His abhorrence of sin. Today love to brothers and sisters would not permit us to bring their sin to light without first trying to put it right: "If thy brother sin against thee... " (Mat. 18: 15). Jacob may have been troubled at the prospect of a return to Shechem after the trouble his family had caused there previously (see Gen. 34) and it would be out of love to his father that Joseph travelled the 50 or 60 miles there and the farther 12-20 on to Dothan. Whatever ambivalent attitude we may have to Joseph at this period, the brothers stand out as cruel, callous, heartless men with Reuben, supposedly their leader, as unstable and weak, fearful only because in his position as eldest he was answerable for what they did!

D. J. Webster

From Manchester: The relevance of the study title to the material in the chapter was rather difficult to follow. However, we tried to find some guidelines regarding tending the flock of God from two viewpoints:

- (a) allusions to literal care of sheep and its parallels in spiritual experience
- (b) consideration of Jacob's "tending" of his own family, which

in one sense could **be regarded** as **the** embryo of **the** flock of God (*cf.* **Ps. 78: 52**) [Comment 12].

Narrative references to shepherd responsibilities

- (a) Joseph, at **the** age of seventeen, was responsible to help care for Jacob's flocks, suggesting the wisdom of involving younger members of **the** spiritual flock **in** activities through **which** they will **gain** experience **and** grow **in** spiritual **understanding and** skill (*cf.* 1 Tim. 4: 12).
- (b) Joseph was apparently **assigned** to work **with Dan and Naphtali** (sons of Bilhah) **and Gad and Asher** (sons of Zilpah). **They were far** from ideal **in character**, as shown **by the** evil report Joseph **had** to give **his father** about them. **But he** must learn to work **in** co-operation **with** others, **despite deficiencies and** sources of **disagreement**. So among **the** flock of God **there must be** willingness to co-operate with **imperfect saints and** to work together **despite** varying dispositions. **Yet we must be** faithful **in** matters of principle (**1 Cor. 13: 4-7; 2 Cor. 7: 8, 12, 15**).
- (c) Jacob sent Joseph to **see** how **his brethren fared**. This involved a journey of approximately **50** miles from Hebron to **Shechem** which was a place to which Jacob's family **might** well have **feared** to go, **in** view of **the** massacre of Shechemites **by** Levi **and** Simeon (**Gen. 34: 25, 30**). When Joseph **arrived there** he found **that his brethren had** moved on a **further** 15 miles to Dothan. **Yet he** was **undeterred and** undertook **this extra** journey. May we draw from this **an** example of courage, perseverance **and** self-denying effort **in** seeking **the** welfare of **the** flock (*cf.* Acts 20: 28, 33-35)?

Jacob and his family as an illustration of "tending the flock of God"

- (a) "*Doing nothing by partiality*" (1 Tim. 5: 20-21). It **is** clear that among **the** flock of God impartial dealings **are** most important. Was Jacob's special love for Joseph **an** example of **the** evil effects of partiality? Some took **this** view. **They** felt **it** wrong for Jacob to let **his** special affection **be** so evident **and that he** aggravated **the resentment** of **his** other sons **by** providing **the** distinctive **garment** to Joseph as a **mark** of outstanding honour. **But** others thought **that** Jacob was simply recognizing **the fact** of Joseph's outstanding **character and** devotion; **his** faithfulness, **uprightness and** God-given graces of personality [Comment 3].

Some of the other sons were unattractive characters, whose evil ways are recorded. Jacob's recognition of Joseph may have been resented just as the Lord's perfect purity, love and truth aroused envious resentment against him (John 15: 22-25). John was the disciple whom Jesus loved; Peter, James and John were frequently given a place of special privilege. But this did not imply partiality. Whether in assembly or family responsibility we should be impartial: but as saints in the flock we should equally be on our guard against wrongly motivated resentments.

- (b) *The "dreamer"*. Was Joseph right to disclose his dreams? Was his father right in rebuking him? If motivated by pride at the prospect of authority over his brethren, Joseph's disclosure would be open to censure. But if he was sharing in a right spirit what God had so remarkably revealed, he could not be criticized for doing this. Jacob rebuked Joseph (v. 11) but kept the saying in mind! Should he not rather have recognized that God was speaking to Joseph in a remarkable way - this gift of interpreting dreams was to prove God-given for far-reaching ends. So among the flock of God, divinely given gift should be encouraged not resented (1 Tim. 4: 14; 2 Tim. 1: 6). Those endowed with gifts should exercise them for edification and out of love (1 Cor. 13: 1-3, 14: 12).
- (c) *Development of spiritual character through suffering*. Those tending the flock of God should be sensitive to divine purpose through suffering not regarding this as if some "strange thing" had happened (1 Pet. 4: 12). We saw in Israel a remarkable type of Christ - his being the son of Jacob's love; uniquely distinguished among the twelve sons: sent by his father to seek his brothers' well-being, sold for twenty pieces of silver, rejected by his own. Yet all was overruled for the salvation of the world.

Within this broad spectrum of foreshadowings of Christ, Joseph's sufferings at the hands of his brethren were seen as a faint illustration of Christ Himself being made perfect through sufferings. He was of course sinless and was made perfect only in the sense of being perfected through experience to be a High Priest on behalf of a weak and failing people. But Joseph's experience of suffering deepened his spiritual character, developed in him qualities which would otherwise have been lacking. God had a wise purpose in this discipline.

Jacob also must know years of bitter sorrow after being cruelly deceived by his ten sons. As patriarchal shepherd of his family flock he must suffer and show an example of continuing trust in the promises of God, in this way proving a tower of strength spiritually to others enduring the disciplines of suffering (*cf.* 2 Cor. 11: 23-28; 12: 7-10).

G. J. E. Udoh

Prom Nottingham: There comes a time in the experience of spiritually minded men who have a responsibility in the service of God to consider the possible future and to exercise themselves as to who it is that is being raised up by God to take over when older ones are no longer able to carry the burden. A reading of Genesis 37 leads us to think that Jacob may have had some thought along these lines. No longer was he young and behind him lay a wealth of experience. Not only so, but God had communed with him and taught him many truths.

Not all that God revealed to His servants of old has been recorded in the Scriptures. For example, consider the Spirit-given record of the life of Abraham and compare this with the statement in John 8: 56. Similarly consider the record of the life of Moses and compare with Hebrews 11: 26. In our study of this month's subject it was thought that Jacob had received guidance from God as to which of his sons would walk in his ways and Jacob had been led to discern the one on whom the major responsibility to hold the truth of God would fall after his death. Joseph was seen by his father as different in attitude to spiritual things from his brethren and, later, Jacob could say "... him that was separate from his brethren", or, as the R. V. margin shows was "prince among" his brethren (Gen. 49: 26).

It is understandable, therefore, that Jacob's heart should be drawn towards Joseph, not in a spirit of undesirable favouritism, but rather in an acknowledgement of God's purpose. So Jacob made Joseph a coat of many colours. Some thought this was an unwise action on the father's part tending only to aggravate the ill-feeling which the brothers had for Joseph but, on the other hand, Jacob, by giving his son this distinctive apparel was probably desirous of impressing on his other sons the wrong of their own manner of life and that right conduct reaps rewards.

Although Joseph's dreams and the perceived interpretations (Gen. 37: 8, 10) caused the brothers to hate him more, they were, in fact, revelations from God portraying the truth, and as such the dreams and

their meanings must not be concealed whatever the consequences but must be declared openly. In spite of his brothers' attitude it seems they accepted, however reluctantly, that the dreams and interpretations were true because we read "his brethren *envied* him" (v. 11). In contrast, and in spite of his rebuke, which was probably spoken in a moment of fear and uncertainty about the older sons' reactions, Jacob, like Mary at a later time, "kept the saying in mind" (v. 11). One wonders if he recollected it during the experiences related in Gen. 45: 25-28; 46: 28, 30. There appears to be no scripture stating that Jacob did bow before Joseph but, even if he did not in the physical sense, he bowed in spirit in sending to him at the time of famine.

The "evil report" of his brothers which Joseph brought to their father (v. 2) would be prompted, we judge, not by a spirit of tale-telling but rather by Joseph's regret for their attitude and a desire on his part for them to share in his own spirituality. His brothers' lack of this quality, along with their apparent disregard for their father's interests (Gen. 34: 30; 37: 32-34) must have caused Joseph much distress of soul. Yet this is another case where truth must be brought into the open and not glossed over or concealed, although the motive was no doubt Joseph's love for his brethren (compare his willingness to undertake a long and dangerous journey on their behalf, Gen. 37: 12-17) and a desire that they too might become "fruitful boughs".

All these points have their counterpart in the tending of the flock of God in the present day. As Joseph responded to whatever revelation he had from God as well as learning from his father's experiences, so with the shepherd of the flock, there must be that waiting upon God and His word and that readiness to learn of others and subject oneself when necessary. Love for the Lord should be reflected in love for the saints and this will demand very often a "long and dangerous journey" metaphorically speaking in seeking to reach and help restore some wandering sheep. At a later stage in Joseph's experience with his brethren he could say to them "Come near to me" (Gen. 45: 4), and, correspondingly, there must be a readiness on the part of the under-shepherd to welcome back when the moment of repentance and return comes. In dealing with individuals and situations a spirit of discernment is required coupled with knowledge and wisdom (*cf.* 1 Cor. 12: 8). Bringing and hearing reports of the state of the flock can often bring sorrow or pain as the attitude of his sons must have grieved Jacob, but such things have to be faced.

Although our particular syllabus subject is Joseph and tending the

flock of God, in passing we note that the chapter before us presents Joseph as a type of the Lord Jesus in several different ways. His concern for his brethren, the journey he undertook, the coat of many colours, the hatred and envy of his brethren, his rejection by them and his being sold into Egypt speak of the One who at infinite cost was concerned about us. Further, in the words of Jacob (Gen. 37: 35) we have an introduction to important truths about the grave and Sheol.

R. Hickling

COMMENTS

1. (Derby): Jeremiah 38: 6 states specifically, "And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: and Jeremiah sank in the mire". We are not told that there was mire in the pit in Gen, 37: 24, but in Ps. 40: 2 the same word "pit" is used where we read, "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay". The cruelty of deprivation and thirst is perhaps indicated in Genesis, though as our friends observe, Joseph's suffering and subsequent exaltation as deliverer prefigured the suffering and glorious exaltation of our Lord.

2. (Galston): I agree with this interpretation as opposed to one which would suggest that he was a lad compared with the sons of the handmaidens.

Seven years of Jacob's service were spent with Laban before the feast (Gen. 29: 20-22). Four sons of Leah were born before Leah left bearing (Gen. 30: 9), so that the best part of seven years would be over before the second of the sons of Zilpah was born (Gen. 30: 9-12).

Rachel had already borne Joseph when Jacob said to Laban, "I will again feed thy flock" (Gen. 30: 25, 31) and Jacob served a further six years for his flock (Gen. 31: 41). Joseph was therefore not many years removed in age from the sons of the handmaidens.

The word "lad" in Gen. 37: 2 broadly covers youth without necessarily implying puerility. Abijah could call Rehoboam young (*Heb. na'ar* = lad, 2 Chr. 13: 7), and yet Rehoboam began to reign when he was forty-one years old (1 Kings 14: 21).

E. A.

3. (Several Papers): It should be noted that in the statement made in Genesis 37: 3 the name "Israel" is used and not "Jacob". It could be inferred from this that spiritual discernment was exercised in the directing

of the love shown to Joseph. Joseph had attractive physical features, inherited from his mother (*cf.* Gen. 29: 17; 39: 6), but he also displayed a beauty of character that became even more apparent in later years. Like the One he so beautifully foreshadows he was worthy of his father's love,

J. K. D. J.

3. **(Liverpool):** See also in this connection B. S. 8304, Comment 14.

4. **(Liverpool):** The sons of Jacob apart from Benjamin could not have been very far removed from one another in age, and comparatively speaking they were born when Jacob was fairly old.

Working back from the age of 130 years when Jacob stood before Pharaoh (47: 9), there were two years of famine (45: 6), seven years of plenty (41: 53) and thirty years until Joseph stood before Pharaoh (41: 46), a total of 39 years, which in Jacob's life meant that he was 91 years old when Joseph was born, and only a little less when his older sons were born.

Nevertheless, Joseph in particular is singled out as the son of his old age (37: 3). The Hebrew word "*lo*" represented here by "his" in the R. V., elsewhere in the Scriptures can commonly mean "to him", and this Hebrew word "*lo*" is omitted when Benjamin is described by the brothers as a child of his old age (44: 20); the thought in Gen. 37: 3 perhaps being that as the son of old age *to him*, Joseph was chosen from among his brothers to remain with Jacob and to attend and serve him in his old age. This says more than the mere fact that Joseph was born when Jacob was old; and as our Liverpool brethren rightly remark, Joseph would learn much from Jacob's experiences with God and also from what Jacob had learned from his forefathers and which he might impart to him. The period in the vale of Hebron would be ideal for this, coming as it did in the aftermath of Jacob's experience at Peniel.

5. (Liverpool): The word is used is used of a verbal rebuke, and the intention was perhaps to shield Joseph from the resentment of his brothers. It may be significant that the word "rebuked" here in the Hebrew is not followed by the sign of the direct object, but by a preposition. God rebuked the Red Sea, not to dry it up for ever (Ps. 106: 9), but to deliver His people.

6. **(Liverpool):** How great indeed is the wonder that God sent the Son, that He gave His only-begotten!

E. A.

7. (Liverpool): A number of our contributors take the latter view, which is more in keeping with the character of Joseph as depicted in the inspired record.

J. K. D. J.

8. (Cowdenbeath): Perhaps this is looking too hard for spiritual significance! The sheep were only animals, after all, and looking after them was their job. Many people do their jobs perfectly competently while bearing grudges against others.

9. (Galston): As they were looking after a large flock, would it not be normal to move on to another place when the grazing was exhausted at Shechem?

3. (Birkenhead and others): "Israel loved Joseph" (v. 3) dispels conjecture especially when considered in conjunction with Gen. 42: 26 (and the RVM) and the issues of leadership depicted in the events of Gen. 37. A man whom the Spirit calls "Israel" does not have favourites. See how it is the spiritual bond between Israel and Joseph that is emphasized by the expression "the son of his old age" (37: 3) in contrast to Benjamin, "a child of his old age" (Gen. 44: 20).

4. (Liverpool): Friends in Liverpool are right to emphasize the significance of the name "Israel" but the significance of the name Jacob is not that to which they allude. "Jacob" depicts a man born with a disadvantage. Against this, worm-like, he struggles and wrestles as though against fortuitous chance but leaves behind a record of divine election. Is this not true of believers today quite apart from any matters of wrong-doing?

10. (Derby): How do friends in Derby know the shape of the pit?

11. (Derby): Which scripture tells us the price of a male slave under twenty?

12. (Manchester): It is good that friends in Manchester found the subject difficult because truth hard-won tends to be tightly held. By persisting, they have been able to present valuable truth rarely written down hitherto. The subject was framed, as indeed was the syllabus for the entire year, so as not to concentrate on foreshadowings of the life of the Lord Jesus but to develop an alternative theme namely the unchangeable character of God's way for the disciple. The events of this chapter are then to be seen in the light of Isa. 29: 22-3 and compared with John 18: 19 and Heb. 13: 17, 1Pet. 5: 1-11. It is often in the later years of the disciple's pilgrimage that the heart may turn actively to shepherd-care and to look for assistance in the work from a younger person.

I. E. P.

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Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8311

In this month's study we are entering the final phase of the life of the old pilgrim, Jacob. The trials and sorrows of his pilgrimage had been many and varied but the final years were to be calm and bright.

The news that Joseph was alive and that he was ruler over all the land of Egypt must have brought joy to the heart of the aged Jacob. He had, however, some misgivings about leaving Canaan and going down to Egypt. He would, doubtless, have heard of Abraham's experiences in Egypt and of how Isaac had been told not to go there (Gen. 12: 10-13: 1; Gen. 26: 2), yet all the circumstances seemed to indicate that he should go. Moving south he came to Beersheba, and there he received a reassuring word from God that banished all his fears and so he went down to see Joseph's glory in the land of Egypt.

Joseph had known traumatic experiences in those twenty-two years of separation from his father, but those experiences had played their part in fitting him for the place of rule and authority he finally occupied. In Joseph's life suffering preceded glory and in this he provides us with delightful foreshadowings of the experience of Christ. Contributors have rightly drawn several parallels between Joseph and Christ in their study papers.

The experience of the godly man depicted in Psalm 1 portrays the experiences of Joseph, and because Joseph was such a man his life was fruitful and he prospered in whatever he did (Ps. 1; Gen. 39: 3; 39: 23).

J. K. D. J.

THE ATONEMENT (continued)

(v) *A Propitiation*

^MHe is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world" (1 John 2: 2).

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4: 10).

"Whom God sent forth to be a propitiation,. . . that He might Himself be just, and the Justifier of Him that hath faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3: 25-26).

As has been argued above, propitiation involves the assuaging of God's wrath against sin by the offering of a sacrifice, which provides a complete satisfaction for sin. The propitiation made by Christ as a provision of God's love for men, through which His detestation of sin, and the necessity of His holy nature to punish it, can be reconciled with His desire to save sinners.

Other categories might be added to those given above, and certainly many more scriptures might be cited, but these provide the framework on which a doctrine of the Atonement must be built. Any theory which does not provide for each of these elements must be defective. A doctrine of the Atonement is set out below which attempts to satisfy all the scriptural requirements.

A Doctrine of the Atonement

(i) Atonement as grounded in the holiness of God

God's holiness is expressed in the natural law, and in the scriptural revelation of law. Since God Himself is good, "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good" (Rom. 7: 12). It follows that it would be a contradiction of God's own nature if He were to countenance the breaking of that law with impunity. Even in the case of human law, we recognise that if a law is not enforced it will be disregarded. God must therefore take action against sin in His capacities of Lawmaker and Judge. Judgement may, in mercy, be postponed, but it cannot be omitted. Furthermore, God is not merely an administrator of a holy law, He is holy, and His just wrath rises against evil (Rom. 1: 18). A pale shadow of this is seen in 'righteous indignation'¹ amongst men, when they see a wrong being committed.

(ii) The Atonement is Objective

This means that it has its effect on the one to whom atonement is made, rather than on the one making it, or the ones on whose behalf it is made. When the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross, He gave to God a complete satisfaction for His demands against sin. The passage of scripture which most clearly sets this out is Rom 3: 24-26. Before the death of Christ, God had passed over sins, but His

righteousness had to be declared by the acceptance of a propitiatory sacrifice. He already loved sinners and desired to save them, but He could not deny Himself by justifying the guilty. The sacrifice offered by Christ on their behalf enabled Him both to be just, and to justify men.

It should be pointed out at this stage that many modern expositors completely reject this exposition of Romans 3. For example, CH. Dodd, in his commentary on Romans, writes "the rendering propitiation is therefore misleading, for it suggests the placating of an angry God, and although this would be in accord with pagan usage, it is foreign to biblical usage". He suggests instead that Gk. *Hilasterion* means "a means by which guilt is annulled", and declares that it is "Paul's conclusion that God provided for the justification of sinners by means of the self-sacrifice of Christ in life and death". However, this self-sacrifice is not seen as paying any penalty or satisfying any necessity in God's own nature, but as the supreme example of one suffering wrong at the hands of his fellows, and being vindicated by His God. Although, when read in full, the argument seems plausible in relation to Romans 3 alone, it fails sufficiently to take into account God's holiness, expressed in His wrath against sin (Rom 1: 18), and the clear statements of Scripture that it was God who made Christ to be sin (2 Cor. 5: 21) and God who made Him accursed for us (Gal. 3: 13). Without questioning Professor Dodd's integrity, one might suggest that his view of the Atonement is coloured by an opinion that the 'wrath of God' is an outdated concept. It is, of course, a difficulty to every expositor of the Scriptures that his exposition tends to be influenced by his general philosophy.

to be continued

P. L. Hickling

JOSEPH AND FRUITBEARING (Gen. 45: 25 - 47: 12; 47: 28-31)

From **Birkenhead**: The portion of Scripture which we used to help us in our consideration of the subject clearly showed Joseph as a servant of God and as such he was able to be used by God for His purpose. Joseph did not seek to retaliate for any harm which was done to him, but allowed God to work in His own way and time. The knowledge of God and Joseph's faith and confidence in Him must have been as apparent to discerning observers then, as they are to us when we read the record preserved for us. He was clearly recognised as a godly and upright man and his witness was, therefore, the stronger because his actions and life supported his beliefs.

The essence of Joseph's fruitbearing was the fulfilling of the

requirements of the Lord as a result of his willingness to defer to the will of God at all times, even in adversity. His witness was not only verbal, but was expressed in caring action for others, and in his manner of life and attitude towards others no matter how they approached or reacted to him.

In our study and discussion we used among others the following words which not only describe Joseph's life, but if applied in our own lives would lead to the bearing of better fruit for God - respectful, forgiving, thoughtful, caring, loving, Godfilled, upright, righteous, Godfearing, willing and servant.

We considered how the Scriptures tell us that before such manner of life can be observed in us the Spirit of God must dwell in us richly. The Lord spoke of the believer's hidden secret of fruitfulness, "I am the vine, ye are the branches" (John 15: 5). He also pointed out that apart from the vine the branch cannot be fruitful. Gen. 39: 2, 23 show that Joseph prospered because of his link with an unseen source. If we quench, or allow the Spirit to be quenched, then our consequent actions will be no witness to our God, and the harvest of fruit from us will be poor.

We considered the adversity through which Joseph passed, and were reminded that God will never try us beyond that which we can withstand (1 Cor. 10: 13). There will always be a way to overcome and our closeness to God will allow us to triumph and bear rich fruit to His glory.

It was observed to be a measure of Joseph's confidence in God that we do not read of Joseph having a distressed spirit whilst undergoing so many difficulties [Comment 1]. He was clearly able to see the over-ruling hand of God guiding his life and destiny, a highly valuable asset in any Christian life, for the believer is to bring forth fruit with patience (Luke 8: 15).

As Joseph was consistent in his behaviour, so we should be "bearing fruit in every good work" (Col. 1: 10) and "be careful to maintain good works" (Titus 3: 8). Joseph appreciated God's purpose in his life (Gen. 45: 5, 7) and believers today should appreciate that they are "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph. 2: 10).

R. C. Hatpin, G. H. Roberts

From Cowdenbeath: Many readers will value a family photograph, a sort of reunion after many years. In our study this month we have a similar picture, a reunion of all (except those who had passed on) who had journeyed together before the experience of the pit. What a transformation for Joseph in those intervening years! Indeed, the blessing of God had attended him and, as is so often the case, the value of it spilled over to others. Egypt was rescued from famine and was made rich because of the wisdom and presence of a man of God. Of course, all the riches which Joseph had accumulated were held lightly by him as if on God's behalf. He knew that the purposes of God did not lie in Egypt. This is confirmed by the words of Hebrews 11: 22.

Jacob had learned no longer to pursue his own path but to wait for the mind of God in a matter. In the question of removal to Egypt he experienced the double knock of God's voice and the assurance of His word.

The fruit of Jacob's life is carefully listed in chapter 46: 5-7 and in the genealogy that follows. It seemed to us that the difference in number between 46: 27 and Acts 7: 14 lay in the addition to the former of Jacob himself, Leah, Bilhah, Zilpah and Asenath.

Despite Pharaoh's wealth the greater man of the two was Jacob. The principle, "the less is blessed of the better" was seen to be at work (47: 7, 10). The wealth that was Pharaoh's had come to him through the wisdom of Jacob's son. So the branches ran "over the wall".

We were impressed by Jacob's reference to his life and to his pilgrimage (47: 9). Life was an indication of his existence whereas pilgrimage expressed the character and purpose of his life. At any rate he was a pilgrim to the end.

R. I. Shaw

From **Derby:** Nothing detrimental is recorded of Joseph. Although power can corrupt Joseph used his authority in a right manner. He provided for his family and put them into a good land, where they increased in number and wealth. The Egyptians hated sheep and shepherds and as Goshen was well suited for pastoral life the Israelites were able to work there while remaining isolated and so retained their identity.

Joseph married a Gentile wife and this speaks to us of Christ in

a future day. He called the name of his second son Ephraim because "God hath made me fruitful in the land of my affliction".

In Gal. 5: 22-3 we read "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance". Joseph suffered, was despised, tempted, and knew deep sorrow and distress before being raised to an exalted position, and through it all he showed the fruit of the Spirit. He was 30 years old when he stood before Pharaoh and the Lord Jesus Christ was 30 years old when He began His public ministry. When Joseph revealed himself to his brethren we have a picture of the Lord revealing Himself to Israel in a future day. We are the first-fruits of Christ and His resurrection. In Gen. 49: 22 we read that Joseph was a fruitful bough. The fruit was the product of the tree and it would spread to others. Fruit can be the product of our lives but we must be careful that the devil does not come in and ruin the crop. If we are not keeping clean, the fruit that we could be bearing will not form. God is the husbandman, Christ is the vine and the believers are the branches. It is God's will that they should be bearing fruit; some thirty-fold, some sixty-fold and some a hundred-fold. We have the example of Christ before us who is the great fruit-bearer.

G. W. Conway

From **Galston:** *The pruning of Joseph.* Joseph's fruit-bearing as food-provider in Egypt came only after faithful fruit-bearing in lesser capacities: as overseer in Potiphar's house, as chargehand of "all the prisoners" and in the matter of dreams in which he displayed unbroken faith in God, while under trial. So Joseph was fitted by God for a greater capacity of fruit-bearing, as ruler of Egypt. Branches abiding in Christ are pruned to bear *more* fruit also.

The enjoyment of the fruit. The benefits of Joseph's fruitfulness reached others: his family were placed in the best of the land, nations were saved and God saw a shadow of Christ in Joseph's manner of life. Israel was saved and made great, and Christ came of this little nation.

Fruit arising from patience. If it had not been for the patient years of solitude and trial, Joseph would not have been ready to rule and bear fruit as "saviour of the world". Christ Jesus underwent patient years in Nazareth before his public ministry about the age of thirty. Patiently he bore reproach "all the day long" while awaiting the day he would ascend to the Father as Head of a redeemed race of

men. He entered into the holy place as a forerunner for the hosts of the redeemed, the fruit of the days of his flesh [Comment 2].

Sowing and reaping. The seventeen years of Joseph's nourishing Jacob in Egypt seems to reveal the value of godly instruction given by father to son during the initial seventeen years of Joseph's life in Canaan. Jacob's sowing resulted in reaping. Bereavement marked the intervening twenty years but Jacob did reap in the end in accordance with the Scripture, "Verily there is a reward for the righteous", (reward is also translated "fruit") (Ps. 58: 11). Christ was returned hatred for His love in the days of His flesh, but He will not be denied His reward, for He will yet see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. All who follow in His steps will be rewarded in like manner.

J. Johnson

From Liverpool: *Unexpected good news.* Jacob was no stranger to shocks yet he was numbed by what his sons told him and refused to believe it until he saw the wagons. We thought of the similar reaction of the disciples to the astounding news of the resurrection.

The problem of Egypt. Jacob, perhaps bearing in mind that Isaac had been forbidden by the Lord to leave the land, found his way to Beersheba to seek God's guidance on the matter. There he received the last recorded supernatural event before Moses saw the burning bush, a vision granting him leave to go to Egypt. Communion is always associated with sacrifice. Abraham and Isaac were considered wrong to have gone to Egypt; now it is God's will for Jacob to do just that. The principle is evident that everything is not either right or wrong in an absolute sense, as we sometimes like to imagine, in God's things. The Lord's time is an important factor and we should not be surprised to discover that an action which would be sinful now may at a later date be part of God's will [Comment 31]. Some commentators have seen Egypt as a picture or "type" of the world; this, however, is not tenable as God would hardly paint a picture of his chosen people going into permanent residence in "the world" with his blessing! Thinking of a different biblical picture, we noted that Jacob and his family had to go to Egypt in order that God could present to us an illustration of redemption when the people left centuries later [Comment 4].

The problem of Josephus wife. It is interesting to note in the light of what was discussed in B. S. 8304 that Joseph took a foreign wife without attracting any adverse comment from the Lord [Comment 5]. Trying to defend Joseph, it was pointed out that in this case she was

not likely to lead him astray; and that she is a picture of the bride of Christ in that she was given to Joseph by Pharaoh, without having experienced any of his sufferings yet sharing in his glory as the Church the Body will. On the other hand it is difficult to go back on the principles of separation we discovered regarding separation which were evident in the "finding a wife" episodes in the lives of Isaac and Jacob as opposed to Esau, and we could not help a guilty feeling that we were only trying to justify Joseph because he is such a nice character!

The problem of numbers. Genealogies are notoriously difficult things to get into agreement and in 46: 8-27 the numbers do not add up. Some commentators do not think that all the sons went with Jacob into Egypt in any case and that the numbers of people recorded as coming out of Egypt under Moses is the subject of dispute too. The position is further complicated by the contradictory figure given by Stephen in Acts 7: 14 of 75 compared with 70 in Gen. 46: 27 [Comment 61.

The problem of the shepherds. At first 46: 31-34 is very puzzling. However, according to secular history it seems that the ruling Pharaohs of the time were foreign kings hated by the indigenous population. They were shepherd kings unlike the Egyptians whose abhorrence was probably religious. The advice to declare themselves shepherds enabled Joseph to have his family settled away from the centre of Egyptian political life and to grow into a separate community and eventually a distinct nation.

Fruit-bearing. As with so many of these subjects we found it difficult to get the connection with the title [Comment 7]. Fruit-bearing in both the life of Jacob and of Joseph was the result of hard pruning. Today the most Christ-like persons are often those who have suffered most.

D. J. Webster

From **Nottingham:** "... few and evil have been the days of the years of my life" said Jacob to Pharaoh (Gen. 47: 9). Yet, although Jacob had known failure during his pilgrimage, he had enjoyed also close communion with God learning lessons of spiritual value which are essential to us today. Much of this revelation must have been passed on to his well-loved son, Joseph, and no doubt contributed in no small way to his spirituality even when only a youth.

The instruction received from his father as well as his own spiritual exercises led to Joseph's fruit-bearing. This was demonstrated in

several different ways:

- (a) **He bore fruit** unto God. God was glorified in **his manner of life as, for example, in respect of his attitude to his brothers' ways (Gen. 37: 2), in Potiphar's service (Gen. 39: 4), in the face of temptation (Gen. 39: 9), in the prison (Gen. 39: 23), before Pharaoh (Gen. 41: 38).**
- (b) In relation to **his brothers, having taken a separate path from them (Gen. 49: 26), and having suffered the consequences, he was instrumental in bringing them to repentance and reconciliation (Gen. 42: 21, 45: 4).**
- (c) **In relation to his father, Jacob. Not only must Joseph's life have been a joy to his father, because he trod the separated way, but also in God's good time and by His overruling Joseph preserved Jacob's life at the time of famine and brought him joy in his old age.**
- (d) **To men in general, Joseph, by submitting to God's will, although this involved suffering, brought blessing by his wise administration. Thus, others received blessing through the evil to which he had been subjected, as in the case of the gospel (Acts 13: 46, Rom. 11: 11).**
- (e) **To Pharaoh, who received blessing directly through Jacob, and indirectly through Joseph's God-given wisdom.**
- (f) **There was abiding fruit in Joseph's sons (Gen. 41: 52).**

Having considered evidence of the fruitful life of Joseph the question arises, what was the secret of his fruit-bearing? The answer is contained in Jacob's words in Gen. 49: 22, "Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a fountain; his branches run over the wall". A tree or plant becomes fruitful for several reasons not least of which is that it must have a plentiful supply of pure water. Joseph was "by a fountain"; he was in communion with Jacob's God, who was his God also. From Him Joseph drew the life-giving stream which produced so fruitful a life that it could not be concealed but "ran over the wall". An interesting reading of this part of verse 22 is "his daughters run over the wall" again giving the thought of fruit-bearing of an appealing and delightful nature. Young's literal translation reads "Joseph is a fruitful son, A fruitful son by a fountain; Daughters step over the wall" [Comment 8].

We find the application of these principles to ourselves brought clearly before us in the Lord's words recorded in John 15. The allegory of the vine is used; the Lord is the vine, we are the branches. The word is "*klema*" and appears only in John 15: 2, 4, 5 & 6. Vine says that it "denotes a tender, flexible branch, especially the shoot of a vine". A vivid picture is presented, therefore, of a fruit-bearing believer, drawing his life from the main, essential part and, wholly dependent on the attachment to the stem, that is in communion with the Lord, in all tenderness he or she bears fruit acceptable to God, the branch being supple and yielding to those ways He would have us follow, and displaying those characteristics He would have us show.

In John 15 we are reminded of the work of the husbandman in respect of the vine and fruit-bearing. The branches that bear fruit are cleansed (v. 2) an essential process if the quality of fruit is to be maintained and one which every believer who is abiding in the vine must experience in some way or other. In the first part of this verse, however, we have the more serious action of the husbandman with the branch that fails to bear fruit, "he taketh it away". Having been "taken away" and severed from the main stem of what use can it be? It will wither and die.

The effects of abiding in the vine are indicated in John 15. We must know "pruning" (v. 2), experience effectual prayer (v. 7), seek to glorify God (v. 8), abide in God's love (v. 9), keep His commandments (v. 10), have His joy fulfilled in ourselves (v. 11), and love one another (v. 12). All these characteristics were demonstrated in the fruit-bearing life of Joseph!

R. Hickling

COMMENTS

- (Birkenhead):** Joseph apparently was able to rise above his trials. It should be remembered, however, that he showed his distress when he was being sold into slavery by his brothers, and they were unmoved by his tears and deaf to his entreaties (Gen. 42: 21). In the reference to Joseph's trials in Psalm 105 there is a statement that gives some indication of the effect of the prison experience on him. It says, "his soul entered into the iron" (Ps. 105: 18, RVM).
- (Galston):** The reference to Jesus as a "forerunner" in Hebrews 6: 20 is, of course, related to His work as High Priest for the people of God. Not only has He entered into the holy place above, He has made it possible for the people of God as a holy priesthood to enter in also, a privilege they exercise week by week on the first day of the week.
- (Liverpool):** Our friends designate a number of points as problems in their contribution. Doubtless this is for the purpose of drawing out comment and discussion for the benefit of all our readers.

Divine principles display a consistency from age to age and where there appears to be an apparent inconsistency a reasoned explanation can normally be given. See Comments 4 and 5. *J. K. D. J.*

We should distinguish between things which are intrinsically wrong, and those which are wrong because they involve disobedience to the express commands of God. For example, stealing is wrong in itself, and God could not rescind the Eighth Commandment without violating His own nature. On the other hand, the commandment not to eat pork was given to Israel, but not to us, so that an action which was sinful when committed by an Israelite would not be so when done by us. God's commands in relation to Egypt were of this latter sort.

P. L. H.

4. (Liverpool): I am of the opinion that Egypt is clearly presented to us in the Scripture as a type of the world although not expressly designated as such. Jacob and his family lived in days of individual testimony, but God had a people in view, Israel. In the fulness of time God redeemed Israel in Egypt and brought them *out* of it to be a people separated unto Himself. Your contribution makes this very point.

Jacob and his family were sojourners in Canaan and in Egypt (Gen. 15: 13-16; Ex. 12: 40; Acts 7: 6, 7). It should also be noted that while in Egypt the Israelites dwelt in the land of Goshen, and were not intermingled with the Egyptians. In our own experience we have to realize that we are in the world but not of it, and maintain our separation individually and collectively.

J. K. D. J.

Jacob was expressly told by God to go down into Egypt (Gen. 46: 3) and, furthermore, God said that He would accompany him (v. 4). All this does not mean that Egypt ceases to be a picture of the world. At that time, Egypt had God's man at the helm, the man who had saved and sustained the world. As such it depicts the world when its rightful Ruler, the Lord Jesus Christ, will rule and Israel will have a favoured place.

I. E. P.

5. (Liverpool): The general principles set out in B. S. 8304 are sound. The desirability of having a life-partner who is like-minded is self-evident and in agreement with scriptural principles.

Joseph, in having a Gentile bride, provides us with a delightful foreshadowing of Christ and His Church as you so rightly point out. Moreover there is no evidence to suggest that Asenath was not a suitable wife for Joseph. Ruth, at a later date, was a Gentile won over to the God of Israel. The special case of Joseph does not give licence for setting aside principles so clearly laid down for our guidance in the Scriptures, and we know that our friends are not suggesting that we should.

6. (Liverpool): There are difficulties in determining who are included in

the figures given in Gen. 46: 27 and in Acts 7: 14, but they are not at variance with one another. The figure of 70 is also given in Ex, 1: 5 and relates to the direct descendants of Jacob. The figure of 75 in Acts 7: 14 embraces all the *kindred* of Jacob who were *sent for*. A suggested reconciliation is given in Young Men's Corner: 1930, p. 171, by J. M., which is as follows:

We read in Gen. 46: 26 that all the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt and came out of his loins were. 66
 Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim were there already. 3
 Shall we say Simeon was in Egypt? 1 70

Acts 7: 14 speaks not of those who *came out of his loins* but of *all his kindred* and here Joseph and his sons are dropped out and wives are included making 75. Alternative explanations have also been given.

J. K. D. J.

The number of names given to those born to Leah adds up to thirty-two (Gen. 46: 8-15) yet the number of her children is given as thirty-three (v. 15). This verse tells us that she had daughters yet only Dinah's name is given. Thus it would appear that Dinah had a full sister whose name is not given.

7. (Liverpool): Isaiah 29: 22-3 amply repays study in relation to the pilgrimage of Jacob and his descendents. Despite an uncertain beginning the final seventeen years of his life were spent amidst his family in the best of the land (Gen. 47: 11). That this was so, was due in no small measure to the grace of God seen in his son Joseph. We cannot fail to notice how this final seventeen years living with Joseph balanced the earlier seventeen years at the beginning of Joseph's life when Jacob so clearly recognised and promoted Joseph's spiritual abilities. Thus the prosperity of all at the end of the day came about by God working through Jacob and through Joseph to Jacob's sons and to the outside world. This is divine handiwork that readers of the Scriptures, to this day, will admire and so "stand in awe of the God of Israel"¹¹ (Isa. 29: 23). Such out-working of the divine character in the lives of those gathered together in churches of God today is meant to occur similarly and evoke a like acknowledgement of the handiwork of God. See John 15: 8.

8. (Nottingham): The word for "bough" (Gen. 49: 22) is the usual Hebrew word for "son" (*ben*) and the word for "branches" in that verse is the usual Hebrew word for daughter (*bath*). Just as a bough may support branches which may, in time and with strong growth, themselves become similar, ramifying spiritual growth should be apparent as divine truth passes from one generation to another.

I. E. P.

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Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17:11]

EDITORIAL

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With this issue we conclude the study of the pilgrimage of Jacob. The overriding impression we have is of a man who earnestly desired the blessing of God. He knew of the promises made to Abraham and Isaac and he was determined that it should be he who would inherit them. It was not simply that he wanted to inherit his father's goods; indeed, it seems that he had none of them; but he wanted to stand in the line of God's purpose in building a great nation. His determination, as we have seen, led him to do some rather dubious things. There has been some difference of opinion between correspondents (and between editors) on the rights and wrongs of Jacob's actions in relation to the obtaining of the birthright and the blessing, and some of us feel that the aspect of his character revealed in these transactions is rather unattractive. However, later in his life he was himself the victim of Laban's sharp practice both in respect of his wives and his wages. Through these experiences he learned not only to desire the blessings but also to trust in God to provide them. Shortly before his death he was able, in blessing Ephraim and Manasseh, to refer to "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which hath fed me all my life long unto this day, the angel which hath redeemed me from all evil" (Gen. 48: 15, 16).

Jacob has his lessons for us. However one views his early years, he was far from perfect; sometimes fearful, sometimes sorrowful, and we, imperfect as we are, can identify ourselves with him. We can imitate his faith in the promises of God, and his trust in the providence of God. We can see how God used him, in spite of his imperfections, in carrying out his purpose, and we can acknowledge that God can do the same through us.

P. L. H.

Editorial announcement: the **end** of a **task**

As the end of this year *Bible Studies* loses the services of brother J. K. D. Johnston, who is to join the editorate of *Needed Truth*. Having

contributed articles for the better part of thirty years, he became an editor of *Bible Studies* in 1975. From that date he has served the magazine with a care and conscientiousness which deserve the thanks of all readers. Editors especially appreciated his knowledge of the Scriptures and his care in their exposition. He has always brought a balanced, considered and cautionary view to bear. In addition, his diligence in administering the time-table arrangements has been invaluable in the regular production of the magazine. We are sure that these talents will be well used in his work for *Needed Truth*. We give him our grateful thanks, pray for the Lord's blessing on him in his new task, and look forward to receiving study articles from his pen.

Editors

Editorial announcement: **the end of the year's study subject**

Editors and others have valued the work of study-groups and writers who have contributed to the magazine over the past year, especially those who Jacob-like, finished the course. The initial benefit of the study of the Scriptures and the work of writing a contribution accrues to the contributors. "Writing maketh an exact man¹". By submitting a written contribution all may share in what has been discovered in the Scriptures. Editors have, however, the opportunity to develop points raised by contributors but it is open to all to continue discussion in the correspondence column. Any comments or replies made are intended to lead to mutual edification. If there has been misunderstanding arising from such comment, we tender our apologies. When differences of view arise it is the aim of editors to see that sufficient evidence is presented so that the seeker after truth will be able, with the help of the Spirit of God, to weigh up what is read and so be in a position to discern which if any view carries the greatest weight of the knowledge of God.

We look forward to a new year in which we pursue together (D. V) our studies in the book of Ephesians.

Editors

A REVIEW OF THE CHARACTER OF JACOB

Introduction

Genesis condenses a long period of history into a relatively short compass, so that the book needs close studying and some reading between the lines to appreciate the lives of the key personalities. This raises many questions, and the following study attempts to provide some tentative rather than dogmatic answers relating to the

life of Jacob.

While Abraham was a most outstanding character, Isaac seems by comparison, to be a very ordinary person, with a real but passive faith in the promises of God. Of his two sons Isaac preferred Esau, for the strange reason that he provided his father with game to eat (venison is a too restricted word). This is not a case of gluttony, but an appreciation of the prowess of Esau as a hunter, which was perhaps something that Isaac desired but could not achieve [Comment 1]. Jacob by contrast was called a plain or quiet man; this is an inaccurate translation, which should read a perfect man (*cf.* Job 1:1); this does not mean that he was blameless, but rather that he was a balanced person, with a spiritual as well as a natural appreciation, unlike Esau.

The Birthright

Jacob would certainly be aware of the preferences of his parents, and probably of God's promise to Rebekah. He would also know that the hereditary rights of the first-born were transferable in those days, if only rarely applied. Such a transfer would in any case require the consent of the father, and Isaac showed no intention of doing this. Jacob probably feeling that "God helps those who help themselves" chose his moment. For it would hardly seem by coincidence that when Esau returned home exhausted, Jacob had some of his brother's favourite meal ready at that very moment. Esau can hardly have been so far gone that he would fail to realise that there was other food available for him. His request to Jacob was strangely worded, being literally 'give me some of the red, this red for I am exhausted". It has been suggested that he thought this was blood soup, which was considered to have some magical properties if the name of the vital ingredient was omitted [Comment 2]. The sale of the birthright involved more than the physical inheritance, and included the spiritual promises of God to Abraham.

The Blessing

The scheming here was instigated by Rebekah, and hesitatingly followed by Jacob. His most reprehensible part was to say to Isaac "Because the Lord thy God sent me good speed" (Gen. 27: 20), which compounded God with the scheme of deception. When Isaac discovered the deception on the return of Esau we are told that he trembled uncontrollably. This suggests that he knew about the promise by God to Rebekah, but had dismissed it as a misguided story, no doubt

thinking that if God intended this radical move He would have communicated it directly to him. Hence the violent reaction when the truth dawned, and Isaac realised that he had been opposing the will of God. So the blessing was confirmed on Jacob.

Bethel

Jacob was sent away while Esau's anger abated, and also to find a wife from the family. On the journey to Haran he stopped in the open near Luz, which suggests that he was avoiding places on the journey, probably so as not to leave a trail for Esau to follow if he were determined to harm Jacob. The vision which Jacob had there, produced a severe response, "How dreadful is this place" (Gen. 28: 17), which could be associated with the description of God as the Fear of Isaac. The primary purpose of the vision is usually missed; for the angels were ascending and descending - note the order - which was to assure Jacob that the angels were present with him as he travelled, so that he had no need for fear from anyone. God then spoke directly to Jacob for the first time, but he still showed only a limited trust, as was evident by the element of bargaining in his vow.

The revelation of the house of God firstly to Jacob was highly significant, as he was to become the forefather of the nation of Israel, the people of God. There is no indication that Jacob had any further understanding of the house of God other than the place where God dwelt [Comment 3].

Haran

The offer by Jacob to serve seven years for Rachel was excessive, and the further seven years was doubly so. The subsequent struggle between Jacob and Laban to outsmart each other was not at all edifying [Comment 4]. Although Jacob maintained his trust in God over the years, there is little reference to God as being responsible for his prosperity until the end of the twenty-year stay, when things began to be difficult for Jacob, and God told him to return to his homeland. Jacob had arrived alone at Haran, but he was leaving with a family and large flocks as God had prospered him, and still the fear of meeting Esau persisted.

Mahanaim

This name means two camps, for God gave Jacob another vision of angels to assure him of protection on the return journey, as he had on the way out. However when Jacob heard that Esau was approaching with 400 men, which was a very large army for those days, Jacob was

again fearful, **and** divided **his party** into two **camp**s. Jacob **then** **prayed** to God in humility, **but** he still lacked **the assurance** that **neither Esau** nor anyone else could **bring** to **naught** *the* promises of God.

Peniel

This was the greatest crisis in Jacobs life. Jacob **had** to go on, **but first God rather than Esau** opposed **him**. So Jacob strove all **night**, which was no small **feat** for a **man** of his **age**. As a result **he was given the name** Israel, which is now considered to **mean** he strives with God, **but it can also mean** God strives, for God **was breaking him** down, **and that was** not **just** physically. **He was** crippled **and** unable to **run away** if the worst happened, but more importantly **he had** at last learned to trust God completely, **and** realise **that** no problem was too **great** for **Him**. Only **then** was Jacob **ready** to **enter** the promised land [Comment 5].

Reconciliation

When Jacob **met** Esau both were **changed**. **Had** God spoken to **Esau**, as **He had** to Laban so **that he was ready** to welcome Jacob **back**? Jacob quickly realised **the danger** of any close **friendship** with **Esau**, so **they went their separate ways**. Jacob moved on to Succoth **and then** Bethel, **where** God **renewed the promise** made to **Abraham and Isaac**, for a nation that should have kings. **There was no further reference** to the house of God **at** Bethel, nor of **the fear** that Jacob **had** felt previously. Israel **as a nation** **needed** to know **the** redemption from **Egypt**, before **they were ready** for **the experience** of God having a dwelling place among them.

The focus in Genesis then leaves Jacob **and** passes to **his** sons, **and it is** noteworthy **that the birthright** was **taken** not only from Reuben, **but also** Simeon **and** Levi to **reside in Judah**. Jacob lived on through **many further** problems, **but** he knew where to **find help in every time** of need. Finally **he** was able to **pass** on a blessing to all **his** sons.

Although we should look **at** Jacob's life critically, we **are in** no position to condemn **him**, for most of **us** would **admit** to contradictions **in** ourselves, and only **as** God **strives with us** will we also learn to trust **him** fully **in** all **the** way **He** leads.

D. McCubbin (Wembley)

From **Birkenhead**: Our study of Jacob's life draws to a conclusion with his final recorded actions and his death. Throughout our consideration of his pilgrimage, we have been able to see that some of his actions have been open to more than one interpretation. We have the inspired word of God to guide us in our observation of his life, but we are not aware of many of the details which would have influenced his actions. Nevertheless, we can see that the greatest influence upon him was his faith in God, who appeared to him at Bethel and who guided him on subsequent occasions. So it is with the believer today; circumstances are never identical, although the difficulties of Christians may be broadly the same. The extent to which a believer displays his faith varies from individual to individual, and is difficult, therefore, to assess from the sidelines. However, what is as clear today as it was in the days of Jacob is that the Lord rewards faithfulness and protects those who seek to follow His will, even if failingly.

Jacob completed his earthly pilgrimage away from the land which had been promised to him and his descendants. He had experienced the Lord's care over his family which had been exercised through His dealings with Joseph. As his life drew to its close, Jacob blessed his sons, and in so doing displayed again his confidence in the coming to fruition of the Lord's promise, even though it might be after his own death. Jacob considered the land which had been promised by God, and with his blessing he identified each of his sons with an area of that land.

It is possible to interpret the blessings upon the sons as prophecy of what was to befall both the individuals and their descendants in the near future and the "latter days". In addition it may be said that there is a comment upon the position, nature and behaviour of the chosen people, e. g. Reuben the firstborn, unstable; Simeon and Levi, cruel and murderous; Judah, the tribe of the Lord; Zebulun, the merchant; Issachar, under Gentile rule.

Although other characteristics may be seen in the other sons, it is Joseph who normally attracts the greatest comment, being an accurate and beautiful type of the Lord Jesus. He it was who, being guiltless, suffered at the hands of the "archers" but overcame.

Jacob's blessings and expressed desire that his bones be carried to the promised land show his confidence in the Lord maintained until the end of his natural life. We cannot doubt that in the life hereafter he

will experience the reward for his faithfulness and enjoy the privilege at some time of seeing the fulfilment of God's purposes and his part in them.

R. C. Hatpin, R. D. Williams

From Cowdenbeath: There is much of interest in the words of Jacob, spoken so accurately. Reuben the firstborn never excelled; Zebulun settled around the lake of Galilee and towards the Mediterranean; the mighty tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh came from the sons of Joseph and so forth.

We also noted the descriptive wording of Jacob, and his references to the animal kingdom. These appeared to us to indicate the familiarity of the shepherd life with such things. *He* referred to the lion's whelp, the ass and her colt, the adder, the wolf, the hind - then passed on to speak of the vineyards, the branches running over the wall, the bubbling spring waters and the distant sea and hills. Here was a mind that recognized and loved the natural beauty of God's creation.

The words spoken concerning the sons show a close connection with their characters. For instance, Reuben's character is one of instability and very often it is the case that sensuality accompanies notability. So Reuben forfeited the primacy and it was given to Judah. There government would rest until One came described as Shiloh [Comment 6]. The name seems to mean "rich in peace", or "Man of Rest". The true Shiloh, then, can only be the Son of God who said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mat. 11: 28). We wondered when it was that Jacob learned this name. Was it just at that time or was it, perhaps, at Peniel? Certainly "rest" was linked with that experience in our case. For Jacob it was first of all his resistance, then self-surrender, then yielding and clinging, then rest. Has it not been the same pathway for today's pilgrim?

We come at last to the end of Jacob's pilgrimage. It appears that his brother Esau's career was, by men's standards, highly satisfactory. He was the founder of a line of dukes, but we remember that the moral and spiritual glories of a pilgrim life will glisten when earthly crowns fade and crumble to dust.

Jacob died in faith. How appropriate the words of David, "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him" (Ps. 62: 5). It seems that, as he realized he would not enter the land of Promise, his vision took another dimension. He fixed his mind on heaven (Heb. 11: 13-16).

Two expressions are worthy of note, "Bury me with my fathers" and "I am to be gathered unto my people" (Gen. 49: 29). These express different thoughts, the first meaning that his remains should be laid to rest with all that was mortal of his forefathers. The second tells gloriously of an immediate reunion with the faithful who had gone on before. He knew death was not a state but an event. The bond of kinship to which he referred is not so much a natural kinship but the kinship of faith. So it is today.

True pilgrim¹. Not for Jacob the splendid temples and pyramids of Egypt. He requested the cave of Machpelah, a request that meant more than natural sentiment. Perhaps he regarded Machpelah as the first point in a land one day belonging to his people and, so far as he might, he should share in the land. He met death calmly and quietly as the wording suggests. At that moment his close companions, sorrow and sighing, fled away for ever.

R. L Shaw

From **Derby**: The word faithful can be viewed in two ways:

1. *Trustworthy*: in which a person may be relied upon
2. *Believing*: Abraham was a faithful man in that he relied upon the Lord.

In Galatians we see the two ideas being combined in Abraham. He was reliable and dependable. We, too, can sustain both these aspects of faith right to the end of our lives.

The Lord Jesus Christ was always faithful to His God and Father. We should be faithful to Him. He said to His disciples, "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations" (Mat. 28: 19). We have the privilege and responsibility faithfully to carry out this divine commission which extends to the end of the age.

In connection with Jacob we see that faithfulness which should characterize disciples to the end of the journey. In Ps. 119: 33 we read, "Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end". This should be said by all of us with humility and by the grace of God.

As Jacob's sons gathered round him on his death-bed, they must have been impressed by the strong confidence which he had in God and in the future which had been outlined to him. Although God said in Isaiah 41: 14, "Fear not, thou worm Jacob", He was in Jacob's life right to the end.

We see Jacob's faithfulness to God's purpose in relation to the land of Canaan when he asked his sons to take him to that land when he died, so that he could be buried where his heart was. He had a wonderful ending. Too many break down, but may we all be helped to be faithful to the end.

G. W. Conway

From **Galston**: Jacob was inspired of God to tell his sons what would befall them (and their posterity) in the latter days and he faithfully delivered the prophecy. The prophecy had unpalatable truths for some of his sons but it is also described as a blessing (49: 28). To hear the truth, however unpalatable, is a blessing. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Prov. 27: 6). The blessings appear to be related to their characters as revealed by crisis events in their lives. The sins of Reuben, Simeon and Levi followed them for the rest of their lives. "Let us fear therefore, lest haply... " (Heb. 4: 1).

Certain blessings, for example those of Judah, Issachar and Joseph are true of them, but also give vision-glimpses of Christ. Judah (49: 10): Shiloh (Heb. "Whose it is") - to Him belongs the sceptre [Comment 6]. Issachar (49: 14, 15): do not these verses speak of the great Servant of Jehovah who bowed His shoulder to bear and became a servant under taskwork? [Comment 7],

Joseph (49: 23, 24): "Until the time that His word came to pass; the word of the Lord tried Him" (Ps. 105: 19). "But His bow abode in strength, and the arms of His hands were made strong". His faith in God never wavered. "Or thinkest thou that I cannot beseech My, Father, and He shall even now send Me more than twelve legions of angels? How then should the Scriptures be fulfilled?" (Mat. 26: 53-4).

(49: 24) "From thence is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel". The Shepherd is the Guide and Protector of the nation. The Stone (from Heb. *Banah*, to build) is the "Stone for a foundation, a Stone, a tried Stone, a precious Corner Stone of sure foundation" (Is. 28: 16). He is also the Builder (Cp. Gen. 2: 22 RVM and Mat. 16: 18) [Comment 8]. The blessing of Jacob and of Joseph... "unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills" (49: 26). In the hill-less country of Egypt Jacob, no doubt, remembered the hills of Canaan and the far off high Hermon mountains. In a marvellous way the phrase transports the mind to that "far stretching land" and into the realm of eternal things. The blessings were to extend throughout the universe and throughout eternity.

When Jacob speaks of Dan and judgment and the serpent it would

appear that these thoughts (of judgment) caused him to interject, "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord " (49: 18). (Not having received the promises yet he saw them and greeted them from afar). Faithfulness and waiting go together.

We thought that Jacob was in the mind of God in charging his sons to bury him (and not cremate him) in the cave of Machpelah. From the promises given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Jacob looked forward to resurrection.

Jacob knew he was dying ("Behold, I die⁷¹ - Gen. 48: 21) and was given the strength to utter this last prophecy and charge to his sons. He then gathered up his feet into the bed and yielded up the ghost - faithful to the end. In his last hours and moments he had been obedient to the moving of the Spirit of God. We think of the Saviour; "It is finished". "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23: 46, John 19: 30).

"A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth" (Eccles. 7: 1). How important it is to end well. Jacob ended well and God is not ashamed of him to be called the God of Jacob. He now has an honoured and honourable name.

J. Johnson, D. Ramage

From Leeds: Servants of God: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Deut. 9: 27)
Men of faith: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Heb. 11: 8, 17, 20, 21).

These all died in faith (Heb. 11: 13), having witness borne to them through their faith (Heb. 11: 39). To be faithful involves loyalty, reliability, trustworthiness, truthfulness and consistency. "Who then is the faithful and wise servant?" (Mat. 24: 45). We know that "God is faithful" (1 Cor. 1: 9), but faithfulness in His servants requires a commitment to the doing of His will, either in individuals (as seen in Jacob) or in His collective people (as seen in Israel).

It was said of Moses that he was faithful in all God's house "as a servant" and "for a testimony" (Heb. 3:5). Our great example (My Servant), the Lord Jesus, said His meat was to do the will of Him that sent Him, and to accomplish (finish) His work (John 4: 34). He could say, at the end of His life on earth, "I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do" (John 17: 4), and, finally, "It is finished" (John 19: 30). He is the One who is called "Faithful and True" (Rev. 19: 11).

Faithfulness in the service of God involves willingness of heart (Col. 3: 23), and patient perseverance (Heb. 10: 36), ever remembering that "He is faithful that promised" (Heb. 10: 23). Epaphras was commended as a servant of Christ Jesus, striving, so that "ye may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God" (Col. 4: 12).

Although our Lord is away now, He is coming soon, and meanwhile we have much to do. As His servants we have talents to use (Mat. 25: 14-28). Let us not hide these away but put them into full use before our Lord returns. To hear His voice "Weil done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Mat. 25: 21). The best is yet to come. Wearying at times as His service here on earth may sometimes become, soon we shall enter into His joy and "we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him even as He is" (1 John 3: 2).

David "in his own generation" served the counsel of God (Acts 13: 36): Paul "fought the good fight... finished the course... kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4: 7). To the churches (Rev. 1: 11) the message is "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" (Rev. 2: 10). Let us "press on towards the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3: 14).

J. Gardner, A. W. J. Terrell, H. R. Dodge

From **Liverpool: Faithful as a prophet.** Although **there** is no doubt that Jacob was faithful to the end it is not immediately apparent from this passage, except that it contains the narrative of his death [Comment 11]. Rather Jacob is presented in the role of a prophet declaring through the Spirit of God "that which shall befall you in the latter days" (49: 1). Perhaps it is in the forthright way in which he delivered the message that his faithfulness is seen - not sparing the bad or "beating about the bush" but as God gave it to him.

*The Twelve Tribes** There were in fact thirteen tribes, Joseph being the father of two tribes, although they are often referred to in Scripture as twelve. This is achieved either by missing one out (e. g. Rev. 7: 4-8), discounting Levi (who had no territorial allocation), or Simeon (who soon became absorbed in Judah) or, as in this case, counting Joseph as one. In Deut. 33, in which the words of Moses can be contrasted with those of Jacob, only ten are mentioned [Comment 12]

Prophecy fulfilled. It is encouraging to **see** that **much** of **this** prophecy has already been fulfilled, in particular:

- (i) Reuben's being dislodged from its natural position as chief of the tribes. Sin has far-reaching effects and no-one of any significance in God's things emerged from this tribe.
- (ii) Simeon and Levi, both being cruel treacherous men, were as tribes, dispersed among the others; Simeon for disgrace and extinction [Comment 12], Levi for privilege and exaltation.
- (iii) Judah's being exalted and eventually given the privilege of royalty. We noted that Gen. 49: 10 was not fulfilled literally in that the "sceptre" (i. e. royalty) did depart. There was an end of the monarchy but in the purposes of God it continued down to Joseph the legal father of Jesus, from whom He received His entitlement to be Messiah.
- (iv) Benjamin being seen here as a reference to Saul of Tarsus (unsaved) as compared to Deut. 33: 12 seen as a reference to the Apostle Paul [Comment 9]
- (v) Joseph being seen as the blessed man of Psalm 1; his recorded history being a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus. Again this passage was thought to depict Jesus the Man, Deut. 33: 13-17 as depicting the Lord Jesus in future majesty.

There are problems to be faced too:

- (i) Zebulun did not live by the seashore, nor did their territory extend towards Sidon, rather it was Asher whose territory reached the coast (Gen. 49: 13) [Comment 10].
- (ii) Some saw 49: 11-12 as referring to the Lord Jesus coming in judgment (an allusion to the wine-press of Rev. 19: 15), while others saw a reference to the plenty of the new age in which wine is so plentiful it can be used for washing.

The End. Jacob had made a vow to God which he faithfully kept all his life. Despite his years being "few and evil" (Gen. 47: 9) he held on to the promise of God and earned himself a place among the men of faith in Hebrews 11. Despite much we do not understand, he stands out in Scripture as a faithful man whose faith we would be wise to follow.

D. J. Webster

From Nottingham: **With** such a large portion of **the** passage **being** given over to **the** description of **the** blessings, **we** **spent** some **time** considering **their** significance.

Firstly **it** seems clear **that** **the** blessings **were** of a divinely **inspired** **nature** **rather** **than** paternal exhortations, as Jacob left to himself would probably have **been** inclined to gloss over **his** sons¹ faults. Also, of course, **we** **find** prophecies **such** **as** **in** the case of **Judah**, **that** Jacob could have known little **if** anything about.

At **first** glance some of **the** prophecies **made** about **each** son **did** not seem to **be** what we would normally **have** considered to **be** "blessings", but careful examination **appeared** to prove otherwise. **In** the case of **Levi** for example who **is** to be **scattered** **in** Jacob **and** dispersed **in** Israel (49: 7) **this** **in** itself **appears** to **describe** **the** future Levitical role among **the** twelve tribes.

We **were** also able to contrast Jacob's final **act** with **the** incident **many** **years** previously when **Isaac** called **his** sons to **him** to **be** blessed. Isaac thought **he** was **dying** when, **in** fact, **he** was not whereas Jacob was completely clear-sighted **and** **in** control (Heb. 11: 21).

We found **the** last **seventeen** years of Jacob's life to **be** slightly puzzling **in** **that** **they** **were** **spent** **in** obscurity **in** **Egypt**. Both **Abraham** and Isaac **had** been warned **against** **Egypt** presumably because **it** was a **Satanic** stronghold, although **the** difference **in** this case seems to **be** that God's **man** was **at** the helm.

With regard to **the** walk of **the** believer today it seems **that** **the** key lesson for **us** to learn **is** **that** God values faithfulness **in** his servants above **much** else. Jacob found, as we **find**, **that** **the** path **he** **had** to walk was a **separated** one, **but** **that** **the** things done **in** this life **have** an effect **in** the life to come. **We** **were** reminded **in** this respect of the parable of **the** talents (Mat. 25).

Jacob's faithfulness is **seen** **right** **up** to his last **day**, **even** **in** his instructions to **his** sons about **his** burial. **Out** of Jacob would come a **great** nation **and** a Messiah, **and** **he** wished to **be** buried **in** the land **that** would **be** **his** heirs for ever.

C. Edis

COMMENTS

1. (**The Character** of Jacob): There is no evidence to suggest that Isaac was a thwarted hunter who found fulfilment in the success of Esau. Isaac's successful hydrogeological exploration (Gen. 26) shows considerable prowess in the conquest of nature in a field every bit as difficult as that of hunting prey. The usual explanation of his passive role is that, in the Scriptures, he depicts truths of sonship. Thus he gained most of what he had because of who his father was. Indeed, in the matter of his own outdoor skills **he** exhibited the same characteristic.
2. (**The Character of Jacob**): There is no evidence that Esau thought this (or that pottage was his favourite meal). Esau was not interested in spiritual things, be they of God or the Devil, unlike Laban for example. The simple explanation of his words is that they are an example of *synecdoche*, the figure of speech in which a part of a thing implies the whole.
3. (**The Character** of Jacob): There is no evidence that Jacob was trying to avoid leaving a spoor for the cunning hunter. He had never lived in a house in his life. By staying outside Luz he kept that pilgrim character. His use of the word "dreadful" signifies more than the Fear of Isaac. It has to do primarily with the Place not the Person and has to do with the truth that judgment begins at the house of God. Similarly Jacob would not have seen the angels had he not been in the Place. The purpose of the vision thus goes beyond that of angelic ministry (as in Heb. 1: 14) and has to do with the Place being the gate of Heaven. Vows and bargains are incompatible. Jacob's "if" is that of reason, not doubt. It is true that the primary lesson is the revelation that there was a dwelling place of God on earth, but Jacob's words and actions, then and later, show he understood more. He knew it was the gate of heaven, a place of judgment, a place of testimony and a place of offering.
4. (**The Character of Jacob**): No scripture tells us that seven years was excessive. We can hardly say that what happened was unedifying in the light of Gen. 31: 5, 7, 9 as well as 2 Tim. 3: 16. See also Bible Studies 1983 p. 83, Comment 4.
5. (**The Character** of **Jacob**): Jacob's experience at Peniel was not to teach him to trust wholly on God. He knew that already. It was to teach him how to prevail with God. See Hos. 12: 4. Obedience to the call of God, not spiritual condition, determines entrance to the Land.

6. (Cowdenbeath **and** Galston): Gen. 49: 10 is difficult to interpret. Possible renderings are:

- (i) "Until Shiloh come" (AV and RV), taking Shiloh as a Messianic title. However, "Shiloh" is nowhere else used in this way, and there is no New Testament recognition that this is a prophecy, so it seems that there is no confirmation of this rendering.
- (ii) "Till he come to Shiloh" (RVM) with the subject as Judah and the fulfilment in the assembling of Israel to Shiloh in Jos. 18: 1. This is not very plausible, as it suggests that Judah gave up "the ruler's staff" on this occasion, before the kingly line in Judah had been established.
- (iii) A slight amendment, replacing Heb. *siloh* with *selloh*, produces the LXX reading "Until that which is his shall come". A similar rendering arises from a variant reading in the LXX "Until he come whose it is" (RVM). There is a similar construction in Ezek. 21: 27 - "Until he come whose right it is", which may well be a reference to the Genesis Scripture. These would provide a Messianic indication.
- (iv) If "Shiloh" were originally two words it could be vocalized as *say loh* "tribute to him". This is adopted by NEB and the Good News Bible, the latter reading "Nations will bring him tribute and bow in obedience before him". It gives an indirect Messianic reference, envisaging royal position for Judah over other nations.

P. L. H.

(Galston): If (ii) above be discounted, then whichever of the other meanings we prefer, we are forced to conclude that "Shiloh" has Messianic implications. Note also that, since the Lord was of the tribe of Judah, is the verse not saying that the sceptre shall never depart from Judah?

I. E. P.

7. (Galston): These words could certainly be used of the Son as a Servant. But He was not of the tribe of Issachar, and it is unlikely that any Messianic reference is intended in the verse.

8. (Galston): The reference is more likely to be to the Lord, Jehovah, as the Shepherd of Israel (see RVM) than to the Messiah, as Christ did not spring from Joseph.

P. L. H.

(Galston): The truth of the Lord as the builder of the Church the Body is different from that of His being The Stone of Isaiah 28: 16.

LE. P.

9. (Liverpool): It is quite true, of course, that the apostle Paul was of

the tribe of Benjamin (Phil. 3:5), but it rather strains the imagination to see either of these scriptures as a reference to him. Is it not more likely that the prophecy referred to the fierce, warlike nature of the **tribe** (Judg. 20)? *P. L. H.*

(Liverpool): Might not friends in Liverpool have a point here? The legendary, war-like character of the diminutive Benjamin to which Gen. 49: 27 alludes is well seen in the fiery persecutor of the church of God in Jerusalem while something of another nature, referred to in Deut. 33: 12, is well seen in the life of the converted Paul.

10. (Liverpool): There seems to be no reason given in Scripture for the change in location of Zebulun. However, it should be remembered that these words were spoken in Egypt many years before the land was conquered, and they indicate that Zebulun would be concerned with maritime trade. In Joshua's allotment (Josh. 18, 19), Zebulun was given an area only 10-15 miles from the sea, but it does seem that the words used would have been more appropriate to the allotment of Asher.

P. L. H.

(Liverpool): Perhaps parts of the prophecy about Zebulun will be fulfilled in the Millennium (Ezek. 48: 26).

LE. P.

(Liverpool): In Matthew 4: 13 Capernaum is described as being "by the sea, in the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali", and reference is made to the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah 9: 1, 2 in the Lord's Galilean ministry.

J. K. D. J.

11. (Liverpool): The points which the title of this month's subject was intended to draw out centre on the fact that, despite failing health, Jacob maintained his pilgrim-character to his very death-bed, staff and all. His clear-sighted vision of future events especially concerning the promised Messiah and the continuity of divine testimony, are as necessary to the pilgrim today as they were to the pilgrim of so long ago.

12. (Liverpool): Twelve tribes are mentioned in Deuteronomy 33. We can hardly say that Simeon was absorbed and extinguished in the light of Ezek. 48: 24, and Rev. 7: 7 which refer to events future to the present day.

I. E. P.

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