

A New Name

"Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but ISRAEL, for as a prince thou hast had power with God and with man, and hast prevailed."

We have been following again in our daily readings the very interesting and instructive events of the life and wanderings of Jacob. We are told that God has caused these things to be re-corded that we may receive instruction, comfort and hope.

The first lesson we learn is that—in the lives of the people of God—*nothing happens by chance*. All is arranged in God's wise purpose for the development of His children, and His hand is ever present to control and direct.

The reading of God's Word is the most important activity of our lives. It *should* be the most looked-forward to and enjoyable. Each day as we begin we should meditate upon the solemn and wonderful fact that *this* Book—alone of all books ever written—has been composed by *God Himself*, for the express purpose of saving man from death and making him "wise unto salvation." Each word is there because God specifically caused it to be there.

And the pleasure and impressiveness of reading these daily portions of Divine authorship are increased by the realization that, throughout the world, faithful and earnest brethren and sisters are reading and thinking upon these very same incidents, day by day. It is an intimate, worldwide communion of minds in the glorious deep things of the Spirit of God, of which the natural man, like the beasts of the field, knows nothing.

We have just read again of the blessing of Jacob and Esau by Isaac. Many questions arise in our minds. Some we cannot answer. But we should remember that in all these things the basic purpose is not to satisfy our curiosity, but to *give us guidance* that will help us to order *our* own lives in a way that will please God.

We may wonder why the faithful patriarch Isaac appears so out of step with the Divine purpose as to attempt to give the blessing to Esau. We read in Gen. 25:28—

"Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison, but Rebekah loved Jacob."

We know that before the birth of Esau and Jacob, Rebekah enquired of God and was told the elder should serve the younger. But—*did Isaac know?* Or did she "keep these things in her heart?"

As we look back and survey the whole broad sweep of Israel's history, Jacob stands out so clearly and unmistakably as the chosen seed that we are apt to assume that the distinction must have been obvious from the first, and that Isaac should never have considered for a moment giving the principal blessing to Esau.

But in view of Isaac's life, and his especial mention as one of the great examples of faith, we should hesitate to attribute to him a complete disregard of God's expressed will.

True, it is sadly evident in this whole incident that there is something *wrong*, and it would appear that all concerned in it had lessons to learn. We must remember that there was no Bible to turn to then. To a large extent these early patriarchs must work out in their own lives, for their sakes and ours, the lessons that are now left so plainly on record for our guidance.

We see *Isaac*—misguided and overly influenced by the robust, worldly qualities of Esau. It is true, however, that Isaac grieved because of Esau's alien wives. He would realize how vital it was that the people of God be preserved from the destroying influences of alien marriage. Abraham, in choosing Isaac's own wife, had strongly impressed him with this basic scriptural principle.

We see *Esau*—whom the Scriptures describe as a "profane person"—a worldly, animal, unspiritual man to whom the present appeal of a tempting hot meal was stronger than his perception of a Divine birthright. Doubtless Isaac hoped and prayed that Esau, his eldest son and heir, would awaken to the great responsibility of carrying on the purpose of God. It is possible that, superficially and naturally, Esau appeared to be—at this stage of their development—a warmer and more intense character than Jacob. *But Esau was not a man of faith*—and the pillars of God's eternal house *must*, above all things, be men of faith.

We see *Rebekah*—with her Divinely-imparted knowledge that Jacob, the younger, was the chosen seed. But Rebekah did not seem to realize that God's plan of the ages is too great and too holy to be built upon deceit and falsehood, however well-meant.

Rebekah must learn that God's way is not man's way—that man's concern and duty is to glorify God by a strict adherence to His righteous, upright principles of truth, and humbly and trustingly leave the consequences to Him.

In the final view, we have but one concern in life—to *please God*. We do not have to do great things, nor assume an anxious personal responsibility for preventing the failure of God's plan. Our ability is very limited, even at best. Our circle is very small.

Consider Jacob's life. Like that of all God's people, it was filled with frustration, disappointment and trial. Jacob did not accomplish very much that could be seen by the natural eye.

Yet how many since his day have been instructed and inspired by the simple story of the way he met the daily problems of his life! He had the nucleus of an unshakable faith in God and recognition of His ever-present *reality*, passed on to him through Abraham and Isaac, but that faith had much to learn and much to suffer before it came to perfection.

Jacob was the fourth actor in this strange incident of the blessing. On what a shaky and shady, humanly-contrived foundation it was that he attempted to secure the birthright and the blessing! For the first he took a sharp advantage of foolish, careless Esau's exhaustion; for the second he used falsehood and deceit.

He had to learn by bitter experience that sharp practice and deceit are the way of natural, grasping man, and have no place with the people of God. Patience, straightforwardness, broad uncalculating generosity and unselfishness are the noble, infinitely satisfying ways of godliness. The man of God has nothing to fear. He need not scheme and bargain, fret to get more or to prevent loss, for he *cannot lose*. Paul, by the Spirit, gives us the overwhelming message—

"All things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

All things are ours! What difference then does it make if we do not get them today? We shall tomorrow, if we are faithful—the great Tomorrow of eternal promise.

The one thing the Scriptures remember about Esau is that he "despised his birthright"—the eldest son of the chosen family—chosen to keep alive the Truth of God in the earth. Today God has chosen a few and has revealed to them His way of life. Can it be that there are Esaus among them—too concerned about their mess of pottage to realize the great glory and responsibility of their call? Paul reminds all such that when it was too late, Esau sought God's blessing in vain with bitter tears.

Because of Esau's anger at the deception, Jacob is forced to flee from home. Rebekah said:

"Flee thee to Laban my brother, and tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury"

turn away; then will I send and fetch thee."

These "few days" stretched into 20 long years, and some time during that weary waiting for the return of the son whom she loved, Rebekah appears to have fallen asleep. We are not told about her death. She never appears again, but her last words here have been the concern of many a faithful mother since:

"I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth. If Jacob take a wife of these daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?"

This speaks well concerning Rebekah's outlook. Her interests were wholly in the purpose of God. She knew her family were the chosen seed. So intense were her feelings about this that if Jacob were to follow Esau and defile the line by alien marriage, Rebekah had no desire to live and witness her family's betrayal of the Divine trust and covenant.

The story of Jacob's life really just now begins. Previously there are but two brief references—his birth and the purchase of the birthright. At life's end, standing before Pharaoh, he says—

"Few AND EVIL have been the days of the years of my life."

Jacob is an outstanding example of learning godliness by suffering. The days of his years were truly filled with evil. This incident of the blessing sends him out alone into the world. Sharp practice and deception stalk his path from this time forward, and give him no rest.

Jacob desires Rachel but is tricked into marrying Leah also, and consequently his household henceforth was filled with jealousy and contention. He serves Laban 20 years, during which time Laban constantly endeavors to impoverish and defraud him. When he leaves Laban to return home in search of peace, he soon after loses his beloved Rachel. The fearful meeting with Esau, the trouble involving his daughter Dinah, and the disgraceful conduct of Reuben, are incidents of the long return journey.

Soon after he resettles in Canaan, his favorite son Joseph, Rachel's firstborn, is taken from him, and he is victim of another heartless deception, which is perpetuated by his own sons for 20 cruel years—the supposed death of Joseph.

Yet during this eventful last half of his life, many *wonderful* things happen to Jacob too, as he learns by personal experience about God's great purpose of preparing a people for His Name.

Jacob's name means "supplanter or usurper." We remember that Esau exclaimed bitterly:

"Is he not rightly named 'Jacob,' for he hath supplanted me these two times!"

Jacob's life-struggle is symbolized in the changed name that God gave him in the midst of his trials. The time was to come when God would say to him:

*"Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but ISRAEL (meaning, A Prince of God), for as a prince thou hast had power with God and with man, and **hast prevailed**."*

A wonderful testimony to the Divine success of Jacob's new, patient, self-controlled way of life! There is great significance in God giving a man a *new name*, especially such a glorious name as this, and the taking away of a name of shame. Jesus said:

*"To him that overeometh will I give a **new name**, which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it . . . On him that overcometh will I write the Name of my God, and my new Name."*

Jacob overcame. He overcame his fears, and he overcame himself.

Let us go back and follow his journey from the beginning. It was a great change when he set out alone from home. He was not young as we consider youth today, but he had hitherto lived a protected and quiet life. We are told that Esau was a man of the open field, but Jacob was a "quiet man, dwelling in tents."

From what he says later, it would appear that he set out on foot, with just a staff for the way. Therefore it could hardly have been the first night of his journey that God appeared to him at Beth-el, for Beth-el is over 50 miles from Beersheba, through hilly country.

And it was fitting it should not be the first night. It would give him time to think, test his determination, and be a clearer separation from the old life he is leaving behind. A night or two in the open, wondering about what lay ahead, would prepare his mind for the heavenly vision. Yet he was not left alone too long, for God, in His infinite love and mercy, knew Jacob's need. One night, before he had gone very far on his journey, he had a dream in which he saw a ladder (more properly, a stairs) reaching up from the earth to heaven. Angels were ascending and descending upon it, and above it stood the Lord, and He spoke to Jacob, repeating the covenant of Abraham and Isaac, and said—

"I am with thee, and will keep thee, and bring thee again to this land. I will not leave thee."

There is much to be learned from this vision. First, it was clearly a revelation and assurance to Jacob that God was closely watching over and controlling the lives of His people. Nothing could more strikingly convey this thought than a ladder directly connecting heaven and earth, with God's messengers traveling back and forth upon it as they carry out His will on behalf of His children. And there is a deeper import in the ladder that Jesus unfolds in his words to Nathaniel—

"Hereafter ye shall see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

He is clearly alluding to Jacob's dream. *Jesus himself is the ladder*—the God-provided connection and way of communication between Himself and man. And angels ascend and descend upon him—that is, through and by him God's purposes are accomplished. Without him the angels could not do their Divine work of leading men to a place in God's Kingdom, for Jesus is the essential keystone to the whole plan. He "prevailed to open the book" and to make possible the fulfillment of its contents.

The common version gives the impression that Jacob is *bargaining with God*: "If God will do certain things, *then* He shall be my God." But the whole atmosphere of the event teaches us that this is a totally incorrect impression. This is a solemn and grateful self-dedication, in view of God's great mercy and revelation.

It would appear, too, that in this revelation of God to Jacob, the initiative was entirely on God's part, but here again a later remark of Jacob's gives us a different picture. Of this incident, he says:

"God answered me in the day of my distress" (Gen. 35:3).

This tells a little more about those first few anxious days as he set out from home. It is reasonably certain that from the time he left home, Jacob's mind was occupied with thoughts and prayers concerning God's help in the lonely and unknown path ahead.

This was the turning point in Jacob's life. His conduct from this time on is that of an active, yet patient, faith. We can hardly regard the incidents of the birthright and the blessing as manifestations of true faith. They were attempts to secure by natural and questionable

means what God had already promised He would give. They were not necessarily proofs of *lack* of faith, but rather of a misconception of how faith should work.

On the other hand, it is not faith to make no effort at all. The incidents of the breeding of the sheep and of the preparation to meet Esau seem to be examples of how faith should operate. That is, putting all reliance on God and none on self, but at the same time striving to merit God's help by diligent application to all *legitimate* efforts and precautions.

We cannot sit back and presume on God. If this were not a vital principle and a common danger, it would not appear as one phase of the 3-fold temptation of Christ. That temptation symbolizes *all* temptation—lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, and the pride of life.

"Cast thyself down, for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning thee."

We must carefully follow the narrow road between presumption on God on the one hand, and the foolish vanity of self-reliance on the other. Jacob succeeded, and is a lesson to us.

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"Leah was tender-eyed (that is, we believe, gentle, patient, amiable)—but Rachel was beautiful and well-favored."

Jacob had another Divine lesson to learn—

"Favor is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised."

Leah had the sadder life, but the nobler position in God's plan.

It is significant that, as he was about to die, Jacob commanded his sons to bury him in the cave of Macpelah, beside Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah—and *Leah*. Rachel is not mentioned. *She was not buried there*. She died and was left along the way.

It is significant, too, that it is the unloved Leah, and not the favorite Rachel, whom God selected for the line of the royal seed.

There is a patient sadness, and a deep reverence, in Leah's naming of her children. *Reuben*—the Lord hath looked on my affliction; *now* therefore my husband will love me. *Simeon*—the Lord hath heard that I was hated. *Levi*—now *this time* will my husband be joined to me. But years later, at the birth of the sixth and last son, it is still the same unfulfilled hope: *Zebulun*—NOW *will* my husband dwell with me!

The enmity in the house of Jacob was carried down through the history of the nation, finally ending in the disruption of the kingdom. The first, faithless king was of the seed of Rachel. Following Saul's rejection, God set the throne forever in *Judah*, of Leah.

Proud and willful Ephraim, of Rachel, became the leader of the opposition, soon breaking away with nine other tribes to form a separate and Godless kingdom. Beth-el, the "*House of God*," where Jacob at the beginning received the everlasting covenant and made his vow dedicating the nation to God—this same Beth-el became the center of Israel's idolatrous worship—

"Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone."

Ephraim had gone back to his mother's stolen idols.

The immediate cause of Jacob taking Leah was Laban's deceit, but the real cause was the hand of God. Through Leah came the great prophet-leader Moses and priestly tribe of Levi; through her too came the greater Prophet than Moses and Judah's royal tribe.

For 20 years Jacob faithfully served Laban, under stringent and unfair conditions, submitting patiently to repeated changes of agreement as Laban schemed for his own advantage. Why did he stay? Could there have been something in it of David's thought:

"Let him alone, for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day" (2 Sam. 16:11-12).

Both Paul and Peter teach us that faithful service in all things is a first principle of the Truth, regardless of the character of the ones served. (In our obsession with what we may term "doctrinal" matters, we can so easily overlook these EQUALLY VITAL "first principles" of *conduct and life*. Of such stuff is hypocrisy made). The one served is incidental. Our *real* employer is always *God*.

Jacob stayed with Laban because he (Jacob) was really serving God and laying up treasure in heaven. He was learning not to scheme for himself but to wait in patience for God's direction, in the meantime laboring diligently at what came to hand.

Finally, in the dream concerning the colored sheep, God directed him how to prepare his affairs so that he might become independent and self-supporting and be able to leave Laban. Then some time later God appeared to him and said—

"Get thee out from this land; return to the land of thy kindred."

So Jacob set forth on his journeys again. He had come on foot with only a staff. He leaves with wives, servants, children, and cattle. But he had found no satisfaction in outward things. There is no peace in Jacob's family, but bitter enmity between his wives and among his sons.

On leaving, Rachel steals the household idols of Laban her father. When Laban overtakes Jacob, he angrily charges him with theft. Jacob, who knows nothing of the matter, makes a great show of innocence and righteous indignation, and vows that *whoever is found with them shall die*.

Laban searches through everything of Jacob's but Rachel, by *deception*, is able to conceal them. Again Jacob condemns Laban for his charges, and protests the innocence of his company. The long trail of deception is still plaguing Jacob's house, and will follow him through life.

Later on in the journey, Jacob's overconfident vow is fulfilled in a terrible way which he least expected—*his beloved Rachel dies in giving birth to Benjamin*.

Perhaps Rachel would have died in any case. Perhaps it was necessary in the plan that she be removed out of the way at this time. But perhaps on the other hand a little humility and caution on this occasion of Laban's charges would have spared Jacob his rash vow and the loss of what he cherished most. Overconfidence and the temptation to sweeping self-justification has trapped many.

Rachel, as she died, called her son Ben-oni—*Son of My Sorrow*; but Jacob renamed him Benjamin—*Son of My Right Hand*.

Rachel and Leah typify natural and spiritual Israel, just as do Hagar and Sarah. Rachel is the first chosen, but at the marriage-feast, *Leah is the first espoused*, then Rachel is added to the family. So it will be that the spiritual Israel is first at the marriage-feast of the Lord, *then* natural Israel will be taken in. Laban said—

*"It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the **firstborn**."*

The Spirit through Paul declared (Gal. 3:17)—

"The Law of Moses (which was 430 years after) cannot disannul the Covenant to Abraham."

So the *apparently* first-chosen natural Israel must take second place to the true Israel of God, for actually the children of faith were chosen in their father Abraham 430 years before the giving of the Law to natural Israel.

Rachel's outward, surface beauty fittingly typifies natural Israel; Leah's tenderness and gentleness the true *"beauty of holiness."* Rachel took her Syrian father's gods. Israel's downfall was that she turned to the gods of their idolatrous ancestors. Of King Ahaz, for example, it is recorded that he worshipped Syrian gods, and—

"They were the ruin of him, and of all Israel" (2 Chr. 28:23).

Rachel in dying gives birth to a son. The nation, too, died in giving birth to their long-awaited son of whom the prophet Isaiah had spoken: *"Unto us a Son is born."*

They, like Rachel, called him the "son of their sorrow," but his Father called him, *"The Son of My Right Hand."* In both cases, too, the son was born at Bethlehem-Ephrata. And there Rachel—the natural Israel—was buried, having fulfilled her purpose. The Spirit by Jeremiah says—

"A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted, because they were not."

Matthew fittingly applies this to Herod's murder of the children at the birth of Jesus, but that was but a symbolic fulfillment of what was to happen to Rachel's children because of the birth of this son and their treatment of him.

Jeremiah's context makes it clear that this weeping of Rachel is the long desolation of natural Israel. But to Rachel and her children the prophet says:

"Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; they shall come again from the land of the enemy."

We hope too that Rachel will "come again from the land of the enemy." We cannot presume to pass ultimate judgment in any case, especially not in view of the brief record we have here. We can but attempt to faintly trace the marvelous types and shadows that show the hand and wisdom of God in the affairs of men.

Rachel's children will in God's mercy, be finally purified and redeemed by the life-work of the great son of Leah whom we meet weekly to remember, who will not rest until he has removed all enmity and sorrow from the family of Jacob.

—G.V.Growcott