

Sabbath School Lesson #3 – Global Rebellion and the Patriarchs – 9-15 January 2016

Christ was that ‘Angel of the LORD’ that led the patriarchs, enduring their rebellion until He would reconcile them with God. To the patriarch Jacob, Christ promised: “And, behold, I am with you, and will keep you in all places wherever you go, and will bring you again into this land; for I will not leave you, until I have done that which I have spoken to you of” (Genesis 28:15). We focus on how Christ led Jacob from life of deceit to life of faith.

Jacob had bought the birthright from Esau for a mess of pottage, and had through deceit obtained the blessing of the first-born from his father. But not by such means may anybody obtain the inheritance, which God promised, to Abraham and his seed. It was made sure to Abraham through faith, and no one need think to inherit it through fraud. The inheritance promised to Abraham and his seed was an inheritance of righteousness; hence could not be gained by unrighteousness. The only gains that Jacob made by his deceit were making his brother an everlasting enemy, and exiled for twenty years, without seeing his mother again.

God had said long before that Jacob should be the heir instead of his elder brother. The trouble with Jacob and his mother was that they thought they could work out the promises of God in their own way. It was the same kind of mistake that Abraham and Sarah had made. They could not wait for God to work out His own plans in His own way. Rebekah knew what God had said concerning Jacob. But when she heard Isaac promise the blessing to Esau, she thought that unless she interfered, the Lord’s plan would fail. Rebekah forgot that the inheritance was wholly in the Lord’s power, and that no man could have anything to do with the disposing of it, except to reject it for himself. Even though Esau had obtained the blessing from his father, God would have brought His own plan about in good time.

While Jacob believed the promise of God sufficiently to enable him to endeavour to secure its fulfillment by his own efforts, he did not understand its nature well enough to know that God alone could fulfill it through righteousness. So the Lord began to instruct him. Jacob was on his lonely way to Syria, fleeing from the wrath of his offended brother: “And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put *them for* his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, *I am* the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, *I am* with thee, and will keep thee in all *places* whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done *that* which I have spoken to thee of. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew *it* not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful *is* this place! this *is* none other but the house of God, and this *is* the gate of heaven” (Genesis 28:11-17).

This was a great lesson for Jacob. Before this, his ideas of God had been very crude. He had supposed that God was confined to one place. But now that the Lord had appeared to him, he began to realise that “God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Jacob began to learn that the inheritance that God promised to his fathers, and which he had thought to get by a sharp bargain, was to be gained in an entirely different manner. How much of the lesson he grasped at this time, we cannot tell; but we know that in this revelation the Lord proclaimed the Gospel to him. We may recall the Lord preached the Gospel to Abraham, “and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). Therefore we are sure that when the Lord said to Jacob, “In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed,” He was preaching the same Gospel.

The blessing to come through Jacob and his seed was identical with that to come through Abraham and his seed. The seed is the same, namely, Christ and those who are His through His Spirit; and the blessing comes through the cross of Christ. This was indicated by what Jacob saw as well as he heard. The ladder he saw connecting earth to heaven, it connected God with man. Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is the connecting link between

heaven and earth, between God and man. The ladder connecting heaven with earth, upon which the angels of God were ascending and descending, was a representation of that which Christ said to Nathanael, that true Israelite: "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (John 1:51). The way to heaven is the way of the cross, and this is that which was indicated to Jacob that night.

Jacob served Laban for twenty years and had ample opportunity to learn that deception and sharp dealing do not profit. Jacob laid to heart the lesson that had been given him; we see no indication of his natural disposition to overreach in his dealing with his uncle Laban. Jacob seem to have trusted his case fully to the Lord, and to have submitted to all manner of ill treatment without retaliation. To his uncle's charge that he had stolen, Jacob said: "This twenty years *have I been* with thee; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, *whether* stolen by day, or stolen by night. *Thus* I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes. Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times. Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked *thee* yesternight" (Genesis 31:38-42).

This was a calm and dignified statement, and showed that the fear of Isaac, and the same spirit, had actuated him. The preaching of the Gospel had not been in vain in Jacob's case; a great change had come over him. Note, Jacob gained nothing whatsoever from the birthright which he had so shrewdly bought from his brother. His property was due to the direct blessing of God. We may recall that Isaac's blessing was to the effect that God would bless Jacob. That inheritance could not be transmitted from father to son, as ordinary ones, but one that was to each one by the direct personal promise and blessing of God. For to be "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29), we must be Christ's; but if we are Christ's, "and joint-heirs with Christ," then we are "heirs of God" (Romans 8:17).

Although twenty years had passed, Esau's anger was as fresh as ever. When Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau, to speak peace to him, and to conciliate him, they brought back the news that Esau was coming with four hundred men. Jacob could not hope to make any stand against these trained warriors; but he had by then learned to trust in the Lord, and so we find him pleading the promises in this manner: "And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, *and* the mother with the children. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude" (Genesis 32:9-12).

Jacob could no longer seek inheritance by deceit, he had learned that it could be gained only by faith; he turned to prayer as to be delivered from the wrath of his brother. "And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when He saw that He prevailed not against him, He touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with Him. And He said, Let Me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me" (Genesis 32:24-26).

We read that "by his strength he had power with God" (see Hosea 12:3-5), but it was not by his power and skill as a wrestler. That Jacob did at once cease wrestling, and cling to the Lord, is not only most apparent from the fact that he could do nothing else, but also from the words of the Lord, "Let Me go." "No," said Jacob. "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." It was a case of life and death. His life and salvation depended upon his holding on to the Lord. The words, "Let Me go," were only to test him, for the Lord does not willingly leave any man. But Jacob was determined to find a blessing indeed, and he prevailed. It was by his strength that he prevailed, but it was by the strength of faith. Jacob fully learned that the blessing and the inheritance come not by deceit, nor by strength, but only by Jesus Christ.