

Preface

The word Jacob means “supplanter.” Jacob was a covetous, crafty, scheming, crooked, selfish individual. So I had always heard, and so I supposed was true. And then I began a series of studies in the book of Genesis with my congregation.

In the course of time, we came to the study of Jacob's life and I jumped onto him in the good old orthodox manner. I searched for an appropriate text for my first message, but failing to find one, I went right on, being confident that I would find abundant material for the second. But alas, I found none. However, I did find that Jacob's life was characterized by the exact opposite qualities. Verily, covetous men do not tithe, but Jacob did; and in every crisis of his life his reaction revealed an undercurrent that was flowing in the direction toward is God.

The Little Flange

When I was a little lad, I lived on a farm and was sometimes permitted to accompany my parents on a trip to town. One day I was standing on the platform at the railroad station when the train came thundering in. I had seen the long flat

tracks that reached far out and seemed to come together in the distance, but to my consternation, the train came rumbling in on big, flat wheels with nothing to keep them on the tracks. It all remained a mystery until later when I learned that on the inside and out of sight there was a small flange on each wheel, and although the train might weave and jerk about, it was the small flange that kept the train on its course and brought it into its desired haven.

The Little Streak

True, Jacob had a carnal nature, the same fallen nature as Esau and the rest of us. He may have bobbed about from side to side, but on the inside and out of sight, except to omniscient eyes, there was a streak of faith in God, and it was that small “streak” that brought him through the storms of life where, at the end of his days we find him anchored to the Rock of Ages; and prince with God, worshiping and “leaning upon the top of his staff.” (Heb. 11:21)

Verily, let thank God for Jacob, and for those events in his life which the Spirit of God has chosen to record for our admonition and learning.

The Author

Lessons from Jacob

Jacob is usually considered to be a crooked, covetous, scheming man. Recently I took up the study of his life and, supposing the usual idea to be correct, I hunted for my texts when, to my surprise, I found him to be the exact opposite. True, he was not a perfect man. He was a human with a fallen human nature, but he ordered his life in such a way as to be a living example to all who would please their God and win His favor.

The first thing to consider in Jacob's life is his election. Before he and Esau were born and “neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand. . . It was said unto her (Rebecca), The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.” (Rom. 9:11-13)

Two Questions

The immediately raises two questions. First: “Is there unrighteousness with God?” (Rom. 9:14) Is it right for God to choose one person and reject another before they are born and have an

opportunity to exercise their will?

In 1849 babies were born on a plantation in Louisiana. But before their birth the plantation owner had already elected the white baby to a life of freedom and independence, while the black baby was condemned to a life of bondage and slavery. Was that fair?

“Yes,” said the south.

“No!” cried the north, and the civil war drew on.

But since God did that very thing with Jacob and Esau, how could He be righteous?

Our second question now comes up. If God rejected Esau before he was born “why doth he yet find fault?” (Rom. 9:19) How can God blame Esau if He Himself rejected him before he was born?

The Answer

Peter answers both of these questions when he informs us that the controlling element in God's election was His foreknowledge. “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God.” (I Peter 1:2) It was not that God forced Jacob and Esau into certain channels of life, but that He knew every act and motive of their lives before they were born.

Eleven little pups rolled about in their nest.

That was almost a dozen too many. However, if one would develop into a dog with certain characteristics I might be willing to keep it. I brought my foreknowledge into action and knew that the females would not fulfill my purpose, so I chose the males for observation and cast away the females, even before their eyes were opened.

A few weeks passed and one was not developing as it should about the head, so I, knowing that it would not fulfill my purpose, held another election and threw it out. I now had two dogs to choose from, but I could not tell which was Jacob and which was Esau. I carefully watched their actions and for a while I thought the one with white about its neck would be my choice. Time passed, and I elected to keep the darker one. Then later, I again chose the other. But if God had been making the choice of those dogs, He would have immediately picked out the right one, for He, in His unerring foreknowledge, would have known every move in the life of all those dogs long before they were born.

And so it was with Jacob and Esau. God knew the controlling element in both of their lives before they were born. He knew which one would fulfill His purpose and thus He made His choice accordingly. That he made no mistake was abundantly proven in the later lives of the men.

Certainly, astrology cannot account for the opposite character of these two boys born “under the same star.”

Controlling Values

There are two values that control men's lives. Most people order their lives according to their estimate of material values. Whole families will move into such a city and continue there a year to “buy and sell, and get gain” with never a thought as to the will of the Lord to do this or that. Few indeed are they who will labor and sacrifice because they have their eyes set upon spiritual values.

I one time built a tabernacle. I had every dollar paid or subscribed. The Lord prospered the work greatly as noted Bible teachers passed through in the monthly Bible conferences and my Bible school enrolled some eleven denominations.

The property was worth five thousand dollars and was all in my name. Not wishing complications in case of my death, I sought a committee to hold the property. Not possessing foreknowledge, I used my present knowledge on about a dozen men and elected them on my board. But alas! Time proved that my choice was faulty indeed, for several of the men had no appreciation of spiritual

values and they wrecked my work.

It was thus with God's choice of Jacob. The hope of the world lay in a Redeemer and God needed a man to bear the line to Christ. Thus an error in His choice might bring sorrow to untold millions of earth's pilgrims. So God, in His unerring foreknowledge, looked down through the life of both of those boys and, knowing every act and motive, He chose Jacob before he was born.

No Mistake

That God made no mistake in proven by later events in the lives of the boys. One day Esau came in, tired and weary, from a long hunt. As he passed Jacob's tent the odor of boiling soup filled the air. He stumbled in and threw himself upon the floor.

“Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage.”

“Sell me this day thy birthright,” cried Jacob.

Birthright—what did Esau care for birthrights as long as his present needs were supplied and he could hunt and kill a deer or two.

“Take the birthright,” cried Esau as he reached for a bowl of soup.

True, Jacob's appreciation of the birthright may have been small indeed, but it was real, and fan that small spark into a flame and we have

Israel, the mighty prince with God. God knows how to take a tiny mustard seed and grow it into a great tree.

The Birthright

Some would blame Jacob for cheating Esau out of his birthright, but let us remember that the worth of the birthright lay in spiritual values and these values cannot be computed in material things. An ocean of gold could not buy our redemption. We could be redeemed only through the “precious blood of Christ.” Thus, a bowl of soup was about as near the price of the birthright as ten flocks of sheep would have been. It was the motive behind the deal that counted with God and not the price. Nowhere does Scripture blame Jacob for desiring the birthright, but it does lay great blame upon Esau for selling it. Rather did Jacob please God when he coveted “earnestly the best gifts.” (I Cor. 12:31)

Foreknowledge

I wanted eggs, so, bringing my foreknowledge into operation, I knew that I must have chickens to lay the eggs. I went to the hatchery to buy the baby chicks and, knowing that roosters would not

lay eggs, I bought little pullets. I fed them and cared for them all alike. Time passed and a few of them began laying eggs, but it was evident that some were not producing so I held an election and threw some out. More time passed and I elected a few more. But if God had been choosing those hens, He would have known long before they were hatched just which would be profitable and which would not.

Lacking Spiritual Insight

When Abraham sent the servant after a bride for Isaac he warned, “Thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites.” (Gen 24:3) But Esau lacked spiritual insight and chose two wives of the Hittites (Gen. 26:34). His parents were grieved about these unholy marriages so “Esau seeing that the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac his father. . . took. . . the daughter of Ishmael Abraham's son. . . to be his wife.” (Gen. 28:9) Esau, feeling that a marriage in the family would be more acceptable to his father, took a wife of Ishmael. Today, men present their works, but they also err, for works are worthless in God's sight.

Importance of Faith

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him.” (Heb. 11:6) Nothing pleases God like a simple and complete faith in Himself. A man may be rich; he may be popular; he may be strong; he may be friendly; he may be a good neighbor; but if he has no faith, he cannot please God.

When I went to rent a room for my bookstore, I was directed to a man in a theater building. I asked the price of the room and was so surprised at the fearful rate that I just stood and looked at him. He soon lost all interest in me, for without money it was impossible to please him. Without certain credentials it is impossible to secure a position as school teacher and so it is impossible to please God if we have no faith. That was the difference between these two men; Esau had no faith and Jacob's faith was real.

The Stolen Blessing?

Some would blame Jacob for stealing Esau's blessing. But let it be known that the scheme was not his own, but his mother's and that Jacob even objected to the deal. However, let us note that the crooked scheme was not so much on the side of Jacob as it was on Esau, for Esau prepared to

receive his father's blessing in spite of the fact that he had already sold it to Jacob, for the blessing included the elements of the birthright.

An Act of Consecration

Esau purposed to kill Jacob, so Jacob fled to Padan-aram. On the way, he dreamed of a ladder which reached from the earth to heaven, and the Lord stood above it. "And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land." (Gen. 28:15)

When Jacob awoke, he did the very thing that pleases God most. His faith grasped God's promise and he acted upon it. "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God. . . and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee." (Gen. 28:20-22)

Let those who would charge Jacob with covetousness consider this. Let them search diligently and find a covetous man who really and truly tithes his income. Will he not rather find that tithing is the first real act of consecration in the lives of thousands of earnest souls? And will he

not find that God will bless the tither and he will grow stronger and increase in spiritual stature?

Not a Covetous Offer

Jacob went on his journey and came to the home of his uncle Laban. Jacob was an industrious young man and Laban offered him wages.

Here is his chance. Uncle Laban needs help, let Jacob's covetous nature assert itself to his own advantage, if he has any. "I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter," replied the ardent young lover. (Gen. 29:18)

This indeed was not the offer of a covetous man. At present farm wages of fifty dollars a month, Jacob offered to pay Laban \$4,200 for his daughter. This was foolish on Jacob's part, for he could have had her for the asking, for was this not the same Laban who was present a few years ago when Rebekah was given to be Isaac's wife without the mention of any price at all?

A Victim of Deceit

The seven years passed rapidly for Jacob and the time of the marriage drew nigh. But alas! Laban had been watching the young man, and realizing Jacob was a peace-loving man and an

easy mark, he deceived him and gave him Leah instead.

Jacob might have demanded his rightful property or he might have taken Rachel and run away, as he later did, but he quietly settled down to another seven years of toil.

By that time Jacob's family had greatly increased and most young men would have been concerned long before about providing for them. But not until the full fourteen years had passed did Jacob begin to provide for his own wealth.

A New Agreement

He desired to return to his father's house, but Laban, realizing that “the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake,” asked him to remain and Jacob offered to care for Laban's flocks on a color basis. Jacob would take the Holstein cattle and the spotted among the sheep and goats, and Laban would keep the rest. (Gen. 30:32)

Let us note that there was nothing in this agreement to hinder Jacob from producing all the spotted sheep he could. Thus when he set about to influence the ewes to mark their lambs, he was perfectly within the bounds of his agreement. Some do not believe that a mother can “birth mark” her young, but Jacob thought they could

and God honored his purpose and he “increased exceedingly and had much cattle.” (Gen. 30:43)

An Exercise of Faith

This was, however, an act of faith on Jacob's part, for his wages were such that only God could control them. Man cannot “make one hair white or black” (Matt. 5:36), therefore Jacob relied upon his God to set the price. And God honored the simple faith of His trusting servant, for when Laban deceived Jacob and changed his wages ten times, God said, “I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee.” And Jacob, realizing that God honored his faith, told his wives, “Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me.” (Gen. 31:9)

Man would ever blame Jacob and accuse him of deceit and evil intents, but rather does God lay blame upon Esau and Laban (Heb. 12:16). Let us remember that there was in Jacob that which is priceless in the sight of God. Let a man come to God with ever so much of the qualities that this old world dotes on, yet “without faith it is impossible to please Him.” It was Jacob's faith in God that made him the special object of God's favor.

The Tither Prospers

Six years passed and Jacob prospered greatly. It is only natural for a man to prosper when he pays God one tenth of his income. There are, however, values that cannot be measured in dollars and cents, and if God does not prosper the tither financially, He will prosper him spiritually and you cannot best God giving.

A Hard Master

Laban proved a hard master. He changed Jacob's wages ten times and charged him with every loss. Imagine a hired man of our day working for a farmer. If a cow dies the farmer keeps back three month's pay from the hired man. If there was a loss in Laban's flock "I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst require it." (Gen. 31:39)

But through it all, Jacob did his work most faithfully. He drove himself to the limit, suffering in the heat by day and the frost by night. And so carefully did he perform his labors and so faithfully did he keep the flock that the ewes and she goats did not "cast their young," and even Laban had to admit, "I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake." (Gen. 30:27)

Ordered Home

Twenty years had passed and it was time for Jacob to return to the home land and in a dream the Lord spake to him, "Now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred." (Gen. 31:13)

At the same time, "Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before." But how to get away was the problem. However, sheep shearing time was at hand and Jacob watched for this chance and "stole away unawares to Laban the Syrian, in that he told him not that he fled." (Gen. 31)

Jacob not Covetousness

When Laban learned of Jacob's departure, he pursued him and overtook him. Laban searched Jacob's tent, Leah's tent, the two maidservants' tents, and Rachel's tent. "And Jacob was wroth" and demanded of Laban, "what hast thou found of all thy household stuff?" Truly, had Jacob been a covetous man he could have easily convinced himself that Laban's unjust treatment entitled him to a portion of Laban's "household stuff," but not a thread did Laban find.

More Trouble Ahead

Early the next morning, Jacob went his way. Laban was behind, but alas, Esau was ahead! What was he to do? Jacob sent messengers, but they returned with a fearful report, “We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him. Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him. . . into two bands;” so if Esau would smite one band the other would escape.

A Great Prayer

But Jacob was a man of faith, and his prayer at this time was a model for all who would live after him. First, he addressed the God who had met him. Then there was confession and humility, “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of the truth which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant;” Then came thanksgiving, “For with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.” Next came supplication, “Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother.” After this Jacob pleads a promise, “And Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea.” (Gen. 32:10-12) Let a man of faith

utter such a prayer and something is sure to happen.

Get Him First

I was one time riding on a train in Kentucky when I met a man in much the same position as Jacob was in. Several years before, he had left his home in the mountains and had later received a letter from a relative warning that he would shoot him the next time he saw him. "But," said the man, as the train carried him nearer his destination, "he will not get me if I can get him first."

Years before, Abraham had with Aner, Escol, and Mamre to fight the invading kings. Now let Jacob do likewise and gather his own forces. Let him unite them with the surrounding kings and utterly destroy Esau and his four hundred men.

But no so with Jacob, for he acted upon his faith. With not a single sword raised in self-defense, but with a prayer to his God, he sallied forth to meet his enemy.

Trusting God

Years later, Hezekiah was in much the same position. The Assyrians had over-run the country and were even now before Jerusalem. A letter was

sent to Hezekiah, and in much fear and trembling, he took it into the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord in prayer. He prayed, "Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear; open thine eyes, O Lord, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations, and their countries. Now therefore, O Lord our God, save from his hand..." (Isa. 37:17,18,20) God sent His angel, and the rays of the morning sun shone down upon 185,000 Assyrian corpses.

"When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." (Prov. 16:7) God undertook for Jacob, for as Esau came into sight, the hatred in his heart melted away and he ran to meet Jacob "and fell on his neck and kissed him." (Gen. 33:4)

A Crisis

But not before a crisis in his own life did Jacob meet his brother in peace. The messenger reported Esau coming with four hundred men, and Jacob was in great distress. "A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath." (Prov. 21:14) Out of his abundance, Jacob sent drove after drove of cattle and sheep as a

present for Esau—certainly not the way of a covetous man.

A Lonely Life

“And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his women servants and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. And he took them and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had. And Jacob was left alone;” (Gen. 32:22-24).

And why this strange act? When in danger and great fear, would not the presence of his wives be a great comfort? But alas! With those wives there were idols and Jacob must be near the God he trusts. How he needed the aid of a spiritual companion in this time of crisis, but there was none. Thus Jacob went out to pray it through alone. And so has it always been for those who would walk near their God. Enoch walked with God; Noah walked with God; Abraham was a friend of God; Daniel was beloved of God. Indeed it is a lonely life—a life where few can follow and a life where many would be a hindrance.

The Struggle

“And there wrestled a man with him until the

breaking of day.” (Gen. 32:24) Suddenly, as Jacob lay in his tent, a man grappled with him. Jacob sprang to his defense, and all that night the two men rolled and tumbled about. At the breaking of day, the stranger “saw that he prevailed not against him.”

Oft has God wrestled with men. I visited a man in a town some miles from where I lived. He was an old man and not saved. As I pressed the invitation for him to give his heart to the Lord and as he wrestled against God, the sweat came out upon his face—and yet he would not yield. Verily, let mortal man beware, for, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man.” (Gen. 6:3) Several of my ministerial friends have testified to the time when God wrestled with them to enter the ministry, and how they wrestled back until God weakened their resistance through the death of a child.

The Touch

Above all things, a man in a wrestling match must have strong leg muscles, so when God saw that he prevailed not against Jacob, “He touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint.” (Gen 32:25)

Jacob was helpless. He could do nothing now but cling to God. Such does God do with all of His

children. If we do not judge ourselves, God will judge us. He will touch us in a strong point and leave us helpless and able only to cling to Him in our weakness. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." (I Cor. 11:30) Many who do not yield to the first warning "touch" of sickness even sleep the sleep of death.

Let us note that God did not wrestle with Esau. There was not even a tiny spark of faith in Esau to fan into a flame. "If ye be without chastisement... then are ye bastards, and not sons." (Heb. 12:8)

God was not wrestling with Jacob to get his title. One of the most stubborn points, in many lives, is with their money, but long years before Jacob had taken that step and, as always, it was a step into greater blessings. Only people who mean business with the Lord will yield at this point. Many a dear child of God can testify to tithing as the first act of consecration in their lives, and most certainly a step toward greater blessings.

Often has God wrestled with men for their tithe. They claim they cannot afford so much when lo, God touches their body and a hospital bill totals much more than their tithe would have been.

Strength in Weakness

As Jacob passed over the brook that morning,

“he halted upon his thigh.” God often does such things. Paul suffered and limped along with a thorn in the flesh. Three times he asked the Lord that it be removed, but God informed him that, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” (II Cor. 12:9) Paul then took joy in his infirmities, saying that because of them the power of Christ could rest upon him.

I often traveled from state to state with my Bible Chart Lectures. Churches were strengthened, souls saved, and saints edified. Then the Lord touched my body in the most needed point and for ten years I had to gasp for breath and often felt almost like dying in the pulpit.

When Jacob became weak, he was strong; for he did what pleased God most. He coveted earnestly the best gift and said, “I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.” (Gen. 32:26) Two men may wrestle and the winner is the man on top, but not so here. Jacob won when he yielded and clung to the Lord. Often, I have seen those in my audience who were in deep conviction. They fought and wrestled against God until they gave in, and when they ceased their struggles, they found joy and peace with the Lord.

A New Name

“And He said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.” (Gen. 32:28) Jacob not only prevailed with God, but also with men. He had suffered at the hands of Laban and had prevailed. Now with Esau ahead, his method of peace would make him prevail over him as well. Let us note that in both cases Jacob did not fight back, but turned his case over to God, even as “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously:” (I Peter 2:21-23)

This night was indeed a crisis in Jacob's life. He had wrestled and had prevailed. He had yielded and had clung to the Lord for blessing. Only those who pass through such an experience can know its blessing. Paul carried his thorn in the flesh with joy, and as I labored through those years of weakness and suffering, I rejoiced in it all as coming somehow from my Lord.

Just Another Name

As Jacob came limping across the brook Jabbok, Rachel may have called to little Joseph, "Daddy is hurt! Run and see what is wrong!" And, with face beaming with joy, Jacob hobbled up and cried, "Oh! I have been with the Lord all night, and He has given me a new name! He called me Israel, Prince with God."

"Oh," said Rachel carelessly, "That is a nice name, but hurry, for breakfast is ready!"

Priceless Worth in a Name

The soul comes into sweet experiences with its Lord that no one else can enter into except that person and his God. In future years the word *Israel* would make Jacob's heart throb with joy, for it would bring back the memory of that wonderful night. Others could say the word; they could listen while he recounted the experiences of that night, but no one could realize the depth of its meaning to Jacob's heart.

As the Holy Spirit strives with us, let us yield to His will and cling for His blessing. If we thus prevail or overcome our Lord will give us "as white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." (Rev.

2:17)

Our new name, like Jacob's new name, will embody the deep experiences of the soul and will bring to our mind those precious things that no one else can appreciate but we who experience them.

Jacob Our Example

Let us thank God for Jacob's life. Let us note that “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning.” (Rom. 15:4) That is, God had us in mind when the Old Testament was written and He chose to record only those things, in Jacob's life, that would enable us to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Thank God.