

LESSON 16 - April 21, 1888.

JACOB'S VOW.

I. RELATE the means by which Jacob secured the blessing.

2. Was this honorable on the part of Jacob? Gen. 27 : 35.

3. What is the meaning of the name " Jacob "? Verse 36, and margin.

4. How did Esau regard Jacob for his course in securing the birthright ? Verse 41, first part.

5. What did he purpose to do ? Verse 41, last part.

6. What did Jacob's mother advise him to do ? Verses 42-45.

7. Into how many years did the "few days" expand?

Ans.-More than twenty.

8. What sort of a sleeping-place did Jacob have one night on his journey ? Gen. 28 : 10, 11.

9. What dream did he have there ? Verse 12.

10. Who stood at the head of the ladder? Verse 13.

11. What promise did the Lord make to him ? Verses 13-15.

12. What did Jacob say when he awoke? Verse 16.

13. What did he say of that place? Verse 17.

14. When the Lord appeared to certain of his servants what did he say to them? Ex. 3 : 7 ; Josh. 5 : 15.

15. What may we learn from this?

Ans. -That the presence of God in any place makes that place holy.

16. Where has the Lord promised always to be? Matt. 18 : 20.

17. What lesson should this teach us ?

Ans.-That places dedicated to the worship of God are sacred, and should always be entered with reverence.

18. What did Jacob do in the morning? Gen. 28: 18, 19.

19. What vow did he make? Verses 20-22.

20. What was the extent of Jacob's desire from the Lord ? Verse 20.

21. Could he have asked for less ?

22. Yet what did he purpose to do? Verse 22.

23. Is it right to make vows or pledges to the Lord ? Ps. 76 : 11.

24. When a person makes a vow, what should he be careful to do? Eccl. 5 :4, 5.

25. Why should we be so careful to pay our vows? Deut. 23 : 21.

NOTE.-The question may arise, "If Jacob had received only food to eat and raiment to put on, how could he have paid tithe ?" We are not to suppose that when Jacob made his vow, he expected that the Lord would give him his clothes readymade. The idea was that he would give the Lord a tithe of all that he received, and would get his food and raiment out of the remainder, no matter how much or how little it might be. The lesson that we should learn is, that nine-tenths of what we think would support us, with the blessing of the Lord, is better than the entire amount that might seem necessary, without God's blessing. God is able to make a small amount furnish as good a support as a large sum. See 2 Cor. 9 : 8; also the case of the widow's cruse of oil and handful of meal (1 Kings 17 : 8-16), and the feeding of the multitudes by Christ.

Patriarchs and Prophets

Chap. 17 - Jacob's Flight and Exile

Threatened with death by the wrath of Esau, Jacob went out from his father's home a fugitive; but he carried with him the father's blessing; Isaac had renewed to him the covenant promise, and had bidden him, as its inheritor, to seek a wife of his mother's family in Mesopotamia. Yet it was with a deeply troubled heart that Jacob set out on his lonely journey. With only his staff in his hand he must travel hundreds of miles through a country inhabited by wild, roving tribes. In his remorse and timidity he sought to avoid men, lest he should be traced by his angry brother. He feared that he had lost forever the blessing that God had purposed to give him; and Satan was at hand to press temptations upon him. {PP 183.1}

The evening of the second day found him far away from his father's tents. He felt that he was an outcast, and he knew that all this trouble had been brought upon him by his own wrong course. The darkness of despair pressed upon his soul, and he hardly dared to pray. But he was so utterly lonely that he felt the need of protection from God as he had never felt it before. With weeping and deep humiliation he confessed his sin, and entreated for some evidence that he was not utterly forsaken. Still his burdened heart found no relief. He had lost all confidence in himself, and he feared that the God of his fathers had cast him off. {PP 183.2}

But God did not forsake Jacob. His mercy was still extended to His erring, distrustful servant. The Lord compassionately revealed just what Jacob needed--a Saviour. He had sinned, but his heart was filled with gratitude as he saw revealed a way by which he could be restored to the favor of God. {PP 183.3}

Wearied with his journey, the wanderer lay down upon the ground, with a stone for his pillow. As he slept he beheld a ladder, bright and shining, whose base rested upon the earth, while the top reached to heaven. Upon this ladder angels were ascending and descending; above it was the Lord of glory, and from the heavens His voice was heard: "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac." The land whereon he lay as an exile and fugitive was promised to him and to his posterity, with the assurance, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." This promise had been given to Abraham and to Isaac, and now it was renewed to Jacob. Then in special regard to his present loneliness and distress, the words of comfort and encouragement were spoken: "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." {PP 183.4}

The Lord knew the evil influences that would surround Jacob, and the perils to which he would be exposed. In mercy He opened up the future before the repentant fugitive, that he might understand the divine purpose with reference to himself, and be prepared to resist the temptations that would surely come to him when alone amid idolaters and scheming men. There would be ever before him the high standard at which he must aim; and the knowledge that through him the purpose of God was reaching its accomplishment, would constantly prompt him to faithfulness. {PP 184.1}

In the vision the plan of redemption was presented to Jacob, not fully, but in such parts as were essential to him at that time. The mystic ladder revealed to him in his dream was the same to which Christ referred in His conversation with Nathanael. Said He, "Ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." John 1:51. Up to the time of man's rebellion against the government of God, there had been free communion between God and man. But the sin of Adam and Eve separated earth from heaven, so that man could not have communion with his Maker. Yet the world was not left in solitary hopelessness. The ladder represents Jesus, the appointed medium of communication. Had He not with His own merits bridged the gulf that sin had made, the ministering

angels could have held no communion with fallen man. Christ connects man in his weakness and helplessness with the source of infinite power. {PP 184.2}

All this was revealed to Jacob in his dream. Although his mind at once grasped a part of the revelation, its great and mysterious truths were the study of his lifetime, and unfolded to his understanding more and more.

Jacob awoke from his sleep in the deep stillness of night. The shining forms of his vision had disappeared. Only the dim outline of the lonely hills, and above them the heavens bright with stars, now met his gaze. But he had a solemn sense that God was with him. An unseen presence filled the solitude. "Surely the Lord is in this place," he said, "and I knew it not. . . . This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." {PP 187.1}

"And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it." In accordance with the custom of commemorating important events, Jacob set up a memorial of God's mercy, that whenever he should pass that way he might tarry at this sacred spot to worship the Lord. And he called the place Bethel, or the "house of God." With deep gratitude he repeated the promise that God's presence would be with him; and then he made the solemn vow, "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 this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee." {PP 187.2}

Jacob was not here seeking to make terms with God. The Lord had already promised him prosperity, and this vow was the outflow of a heart filled with gratitude for the assurance of God's love and mercy. Jacob felt that God had claims upon him which he must acknowledge, and that the special tokens of divine favor granted him demanded a return. So does every blessing bestowed upon us call for a response to the Author of all our mercies. The Christian should often review his past life and recall with gratitude the precious deliverances that God has wrought for him, supporting him in trial, opening ways before him when all seemed dark and forbidding, refreshing him when ready to faint. He should recognize all of them as evidences of the watchcare of heavenly angels. In view of these innumerable blessings he should often ask, with subdued and grateful heart, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" Psalm 116:12. {PP 187.3}

Our time, our talents, our property, should be sacredly devoted to Him who has given us these blessings in trust. Whenever a special deliverance is wrought in our behalf, or new and unexpected favors are granted us, we should acknowledge God's goodness, not only by expressing our gratitude in words, but, like Jacob, by gifts and offerings to His cause. As we are continually receiving the blessings of God, so we are to be continually giving. {PP 187.4}

"Of all that Thou shalt give me," said Jacob, "I will surely give the tenth unto Thee." Shall we who enjoy the full light and privileges of the gospel be content to give less to God than was given by those who lived in the former, less favored dispensation? Nay, as the blessings we enjoy are greater, are not our obligations correspondingly increased? But how small the estimate; how vain the endeavor to measure with mathematical rules, time, money, and love, against a love so immeasurable and a gift of such inconceivable worth. Tithes for Christ! Oh, meager pittance, shameful recompense for that which cost so much! From the cross of Calvary, Christ calls for an unreserved consecration. All that we have, all that we are, should be devoted to God. {PP 188.1}

With a new and abiding faith in the divine promises, and assured of the presence and guardianship of heavenly angels, Jacob pursued his journey to "the land of the children of the East." Genesis 29:1, margin. But how different his arrival from that of Abraham's messenger nearly a hundred years before!

The servant had come with a train of attendants riding upon camels, and with rich gifts of gold and silver; the son was a lonely, footsore traveler, with no possession save his staff. Like Abraham's servant, Jacob tarried beside a well, and it was here that he met Rachel, Laban's younger daughter. It was Jacob now who rendered service, rolling the stone from the well and watering the flocks. On making known his kinship, he was welcomed to the home of Laban. Though he came portionless and unattended, a few weeks showed the worth of his diligence and skill, and he was urged to tarry. It was arranged that he should render Laban seven years' service for the hand of Rachel. {PP 188.2}

In early times custom required the bridegroom, before the ratification of a marriage engagement, to pay a sum of money or its equivalent in other property, according to his circumstances, to the father of his wife. This was regarded as a safeguard to the marriage relation. Fathers did not think it safe to trust the happiness of their daughters to men who had not made provision for the support of a family. If they had not sufficient thrift and energy to manage business and acquire cattle or lands, it was feared that their life would prove worthless. But provision was made to test those who had nothing to pay for a wife. They were permitted to labor for the father whose daughter they loved, the length of time being regulated by the value of the dowry required. When the suitor was faithful in his services, and proved in other respects worthy, he obtained the daughter as his wife; and generally the dowry which the father had received was given her at her marriage. In the case of both Rachel and Leah, however, Laban selfishly retained the dowry that should have been given them; they referred to this when they said, just before the removal from Mesopotamia, "He hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money." {PP 188.3}

The ancient custom, though sometimes abused, as by Laban, was productive of good results. When the suitor was required to render service to secure his bride, a hasty marriage was prevented, and there was opportunity to test the depth of his affections, as well as his ability to provide for a family. In our time many evils result from pursuing an opposite course. It is often the case that persons before marriage have little opportunity to become acquainted with each other's habits and disposition, and, so far as everyday life is concerned, they are virtually strangers when they unite their interests at the altar. Many find, too late, that they are not adapted to each other, and lifelong wretchedness is the result of their union. Often the wife and children suffer from the indolence and inefficiency or the vicious habits of the husband and father. If the character of the suitor had been tested before marriage, according to the ancient custom, great unhappiness might have been prevented. {PP 189.1}

Seven years of faithful service Jacob gave for Rachel, and the years that he served "seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her." But the selfish and grasping Laban, desiring to retain so valuable a helper, practiced a cruel deception in substituting Leah for Rachel. The fact that Leah herself was a party to the cheat, caused Jacob to feel that he could not love her. His indignant rebuke to Laban was met with the offer of Rachel for another seven years' service. But the father insisted that Leah should not be discarded, since this would bring disgrace upon the family. Jacob was thus placed in a most painful and trying position; he finally decided to retain Leah and marry Rachel. Rachel was ever the one best loved; but his preference for her excited envy and jealousy, and his life was embittered by the rivalry between the sister-wives. {PP 189.2}

For twenty years Jacob remained in Mesopotamia, laboring in the service of Laban, who, disregarding the ties of kinship, was bent upon securing to himself all the benefits of their connection. Fourteen years of toil he demanded for his two daughters; and during the remaining period, Jacob's wages were ten times changed. Yet Jacob's service was diligent and faithful. His words to Laban in their last interview vividly describe the untiring vigilance which he had given to the interests of his exacting master: "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." {PP 190.1}

It was necessary for the shepherd to watch his flocks day and night. They were in danger from robbers, and also from wild beasts, which were numerous and bold, often committing great havoc in flocks that were not faithfully guarded. Jacob had many assistants in caring for the extensive flocks of Laban, but he himself was held responsible for them all. During some portions of the year it was necessary for him to be constantly with the flocks in person, to guard them in the dry season against perishing from thirst, and during the coldest months from becoming chilled with the heavy night frosts. Jacob was the chief shepherd; the servants in his employ were the undershepherds. If any of the sheep were missing, the chief shepherd suffered the loss; and he called the servants to whom he entrusted the care of the flock to a strict account if it was not found in a flourishing condition. {PP 190.2}

The shepherd's life of diligence and care-taking, and his tender compassion for the helpless creatures entrusted to his charge, have been employed by the inspired writers to illustrate some of the most precious truths of the gospel. Christ, in His relation to His people, is compared to a shepherd. After the Fall He saw His sheep doomed to perish in the dark ways of sin. To save these wandering ones He left the honors and glories of His Father's house. He says, "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick." I will "save My flock, and they shall no more be a prey." "Neither shall the beast of the land devour them." Ezekiel 34:16, 22, 28. His voice is heard calling them to His fold, "a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain." Isaiah 4:6. His care for the flock is unwearied. He strengthens the weak, relieves the suffering, gathers the lambs in His arms, and carries them in His bosom. His sheep love Him. "And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers." John 10:5. {PP 190.3}

Christ says, "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth; and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine." Verses 11-14. {PP 191.1}

Christ, the Chief Shepherd, has entrusted the care of His flock to His ministers as undershepherds; and He bids them have the same interest that He has manifested, and feel the sacred responsibility of the charge He has entrusted to them. He has solemnly commanded them to be faithful, to feed the flock, to strengthen the weak, to revive the fainting, and to shield them from devouring wolves. {PP 191.2}

To save His sheep, Christ laid down His own life; and He points His shepherds to the love thus manifested, as their example. But "he that is an hireling, . . . whose own the sheep are not," has no real interest in the flock. He is laboring merely for gain, and he cares only for himself. He studies his own profit instead of the interest of his charge; and in time of peril or danger he will flee, and leave the flock. {PP 191.3}

The apostle Peter admonishes the undershepherds: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." 1 Peter 5:2, 3. Paul says, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." Acts 20:28, 29. {PP 191.4}

All who regard as an unwelcome task the care and burdens that fall to the lot of the faithful shepherd, are reproved by the apostle: "Not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." 1 Peter 5:2. All such unfaithful servants the Chief Shepherd would willingly release. The church of Christ has been purchased with His blood, and every shepherd should realize that the sheep under his care cost an infinite sacrifice. He should regard them each as of priceless worth, and should be unwearied in his efforts to keep them in a healthy, flourishing condition. The shepherd who is imbued with the spirit of Christ will imitate His self-denying example, constantly laboring for the welfare of his charge; and the flock will prosper under his care. {PP 192.1}

All will be called to render a strict account of their ministry. The Master will demand of every shepherd, "Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?" Jeremiah 13:20. He that is found faithful, will receive a rich reward. "When the Chief Shepherd shall appear," says the apostle, "ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." 1 Peter 5:4. {PP 192.2}

When Jacob, growing weary of Laban's service, proposed to return to Canaan, he said to his father-in-law, "Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country. Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee, and let me go: for thou knowest my service which I have done thee." But Laban urged him to remain, declaring, "I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake." He saw that his property was increasing under the care of his son-in-law. {PP 192.3}

Said Jacob, "It was little which thou hadst before I came, and it is now increased unto a multitude." But as time passed on, Laban became envious of the greater prosperity of Jacob, who "increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses." Laban's sons shared their father's jealousy, and their malicious speeches came to Jacob's ears: He "hath taken away all that was our father's, and of that which was our father's hath he gotten all this glory. And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before." {PP 192.4}

Jacob would have left his crafty kinsman long before but for the fear of encountering Esau. Now he felt that he was in danger from the sons of Laban, who, looking upon his wealth as their own, might endeavor to secure it by violence. He was in great perplexity and distress, not knowing which way to turn. But mindful of the gracious Bethel promise, he carried his case to God, and sought direction from Him. In a dream his prayer was answered: "Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee." {PP 193.1}

Laban's absence afforded opportunity for departure. The flocks and herds were speedily gathered and sent forward, and with his wives, children, and servants, Jacob crossed the Euphrates, urging his way toward Gilead, on the borders of Canaan. After three days Laban learned of their flight, and set forth in pursuit, overtaking the company on the seventh day of their journey. He was hot with anger, and bent on forcing them to return, which he doubted not he could do, since his band was much the stronger. The fugitives were indeed in great peril. {PP 193.2}

That he did not carry out his hostile purpose was due to the fact that God Himself had interposed for the protection of His servant. "It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt," said Laban, "but the God of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad;" that is, he should not force him to return, or urge him by flattering inducements. {PP 193.3}

Laban had withheld the marriage dowry of his daughters and had ever treated Jacob with craft and harshness; but with characteristic dissimulation he now reproached him for his secret departure, which had given the father no opportunity to make a parting feast or even to bid farewell to his daughters and their children. {PP 193.4}

In reply Jacob plainly set forth Laban's selfish and grasping policy, and appealed to him as a witness to his own faithfulness and honesty. "Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me," said Jacob, "surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction, and the labor of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight." {PP 193.5}

Laban could not deny the facts brought forward, and he now proposed to enter into a covenant of peace. Jacob consented to the proposal, and a pile of stones was erected as a token of the compact. To this pillar Laban gave the name Mizpah, "watchtower," saying, "The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another." {PP 193.6}

"And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold this pillar, which I have cast betwixt me and thee; this heap be witness, and this pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm. The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob sware by the fear of his father Isaac." To confirm the treaty, the parties held a feast. The night was spent in friendly communing; and at the dawn of day, Laban and his company departed. With this separation ceased all trace of connection between the children of Abraham and the dwellers in Mesopotamia. {PP 194.1}