

RESPONDING TO DIVINE PROMISES

– GENESIS 28:1-5,10-22. – APRIL 7. –

"Behold I am with thee and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest." – Gen. 28:15.

JACOB, perceiving that his esteem for the Abrahamic blessing and his perseverance in procuring it, had brought upon him the ill will of his brother Esau, showed that it was not the elder son's share of his father's possessions that he sought, and proposed a journey to the home of his mother's brother. Rebecca, in sympathy with the program, urged it upon Isaac, saying that she was vexed by the heathen wives of Esau and desired that Jacob should select his companion from amongst their God-fearing relatives. To this Isaac assented, and when Jacob was ready for the journey blessed him and confirmed to him again the Abrahamic blessing, saying, "And God Almighty bless thee and make thee fruitful and multiply thee that thou mayest be a multitude of people, and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee and thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land of thy sojournings which God gave unto Abraham."

The journey was undertaken on foot and alone. Jacob, after the custom of the people of that country even today, at night wrapped himself in his outer garment and slept in any convenient place, using a stone for a pillow. On the evening of probably his third day from home he slept in a place near to the town of Luz, and was there granted a vision or dream in which he saw a ladder extending from earth to heaven and on it holy angels ascending and descending, and at its top the Lord himself, who spoke to him precious words of encouragement. Thus did the Lord comfort one who trusted in him – one who had so great respect for the divine covenant made with his grandfather Abraham that he esteemed it of more value than all earthly riches and comforts. It was largely

on account of his faith in the Abrahamic Covenant that Jacob was now practically an outcast from his home, fleeing in reality through fear of his brother Esau. It is not wonderful that God rewarded such a heroic faith, neither does it surprise us that it was because of the lack of this faith that God took the inheritance of this Covenant from the unbelieving Esau, "profane Esau," as the Apostle describes his sacrilegious disrespect to the divine Covenant.

It is so still: God always honors faith. Those who now for his sake and because of their respect for the divine promises suffer the loss of earthly home and privileges and comforts may be sure that these testings of their loyalty to God will not go unrewarded. The Lord seeketh such to **[R3965 : page 93]** worship him as worship him in spirit and in truth, only with such is he well pleased, only to such does he let down the golden ladder, only to such do the angels of heaven minister, for we read, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb. 1:14.) That golden ladder fitly pictures our dear Redeemer, who is the Way to God as well as the Truth and the Life. His own words are, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." Upon this Mediator between God and man all the blessings of God descend to us, and through him our prayers and our offerings are acceptable to the Father. And as the Father spoke to Jacob from the farther end of this ladder, so with every one of us: it is the Father's drawing, the Father's message, the Father's love that our dear Redeemer has revealed to us, and brought us into contact with every good and every perfect gift coming down **[R3965 : page 94]** from the Father of Lights. All things are of the Lord, and all things are by the Son.

THE PROMISES RENEWED

From the further end of the ladder Jacob heard the Lord's voice saying, "I am the Lord, the 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 the east, to the north and 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."

Here was the very comfort and encouragement that Jacob needed; here he had the assurance not only that his grandfather Abraham had a covenant with God, and that this had not passed to Ishmael but to Isaac, and that now it had not passed to Esau but to himself. He was content with the loss of all things else since he still had the divine favor and was thus acknowledged of God as being the heir of this wonderful promise, the full import of which he could but faintly appreciate. And so it is with all who have heard the Father's voice and been drawn or attracted by his promises, and who have surrendered all other ambitions in life that they might attain to the divine favor and chief blessing as heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord. No conditions under such circumstances could really be heard; hence, as the Apostle says, we are enabled to rejoice even in tribulation, knowing that even our tribulations are working for us patience and the various experiences of life necessary to our preparation for the glorious position to which we have been called of God. With the Apostle then we can say, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ and be found in him. – Phil. 3:8,9.

AS THE STARS AND AS THE SAND

It will be noticed that in this blessing the Lord likens the seed of Jacob to the dust of the earth, but not to the stars of heaven.

We remember that in the divine promise to Isaac (Gen. 26:4) the reverse of this is stated: the posterity like unto the stars of heaven is mentioned, but no illustration of the dust of the earth, while to Abraham God used both of these illustrations, saying, "Thy seed shall be as the stars of heaven and as the sand of the seashore for multitude." In the Abrahamic promise both the spiritual seed, likened to the stars of heaven, and the natural seed, likened to the sands of the seashore, are properly mentioned, because both the heavenly and earthly seeds and the heavenly and earthly blessings proceed from that original Covenant. We remember in this connection the Apostle's statement, "We, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise": we are the spiritual Seed of whom in the First Resurrection the Prophet says, "They shall shine as the brightness of the firmament and as the stars forever and ever." (Dan. 12:3.) The Apostle refers to the same class as celestials, comparing them to the stars – "as one star differeth from another star in glory, so also is the [first] resurrection of the dead – it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." (1 Cor. 15:40-44.) Similarly Jacob is referred to by the Apostle as a representative of natural Israel: for instance, telling us of the blessing that shall come upon natural Israel at the end of this Gospel age, when the Spiritual Israel shall have been glorified, he says, "A deliverer shall come out of Zion and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. For this is my Covenant with them when I shall take away their sins." – Rom. 11:25-30.

Not only did the Lord assure Jacob that he was in the right way as an heir for the promise, but, further, that whatever his experiences might be he should remember that the Lord was with him and would not let go of him until he had fulfilled toward him all these gracious promises. What a force, what a power, this experience and the Lord's testimony must have been to Jacob in future years! And it still appertains to natural Israel. The Lord has held that people under his care nor let them go for over thirty centuries, and as surely as it is here written he will accomplish

for them the promised blessing and will yet make them a blessing to all nations. Nevertheless, as Jacob had trying experiences in the interim, so his posterity have had and will have until the blessing of the Lord under the New Covenant shall come to them at the hands of the great Mediator of the New Covenant, the glorified Christ Jesus and the Church, which is his body – Spiritual Israel.

A comforting lesson comes to all of us who are Spiritual Israelites also, for we reflect that it is the same unchangeable God who has given us the chief blessing, which the natural Israelite failed to receive, as it is written, "Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for, but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded." We, the elect, Israel spiritual, may feel sure that if God's promises to natural Israel are all to be fulfilled his promises to Spiritual Israel are yea and amen in Christ. To us he has also promised that, into whatever situation we may be brought in his providence, he is able to make all things work together for our good, and to bring us off conquerors, yea, more than conquerors, through him that loved us and bought us with his precious blood.

THE HOUSE OF GOD – THE GATE OF HEAVEN

When Jacob awaked from this refreshing vision, dream, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not. What a place for awe is this! It is none other than the house of God, the gate of heaven." He was awe inspired, and if the dream inspired the future patriarch with awe, what should the knowledge of the reality bring to us, we who with the eyes of faith see Jesus as the ladder reaching from our humble, fallen condition clear to the heights of the heavenly glory and presence! With what reverence should we look up and hear the Father's voice coming to us through him. How little we should feel ourselves to be, how great the Giver of every good and perfect gift. Surely, as Jacob said,

the resting-place of this ladder must be the house of God, the place where we may meet with our Almighty Creator. It was this that was symbolized by the Tabernacle of old, which was called the tent of meeting, not because the Israelites entered it, but because Jehovah could enter and there meet with the people through their representative, the priest, the Lord's presence being indicated by the light on the Mercy Seat, the Shekinah glory. [R3965 : page 95]

Similarly the Temple was a house or meeting-place between God and his people, and similarly now with Spiritual Israel – Christ at the lower end of the ladder is the meeting-place between God and man. This meeting-place for the present time is not a building made with hands – is not a Temple nor even a tent, but a house or household of faith, the house or Church of God. Wherever this may be is "Bethel," – "wherever two or three of you are met in my name there am I in the midst"; there the ladder, at the upper end of which is the Father, touches the earth. And every such assemblage is truly a gate of heaven. What wonder, then, that the Scriptures encourage the Lord's people to meet in his name, to have fellowship with the Father through him, and to have their petitions borne upward to the Father and the blessings to come down from the Father upon them. What wonder that the Apostle exhorted that we should not forget the assembling of ourselves as the manner of some is, and so much the more as we see the day approaching. – Heb. 10:25.

"And I knew it not," said Jacob. And so with us. We knew not at first about the Lord's gracious arrangements and provisions for our blessing. It was only after we had heard his voice and come to an appreciation of his grace and forgiveness that we learned to love him, and that perfect love casts out our fear. The fear or reverence, however, which we had at the beginning of our experience, was a proper and useful one. Whoever comes not to the Father through a reverential fear does not appreciate the

privilege of relationship and contact with the great King of the Universe.

NOTING AND MARKING BLESSINGS

After he had awakened, thought over his dream and experienced reverential sentiments, Jacob arose, although it was still early, before the breaking of day. He must take time to acknowledge the divine favors he had just received. He did this in three ways:

(1) He took the stone upon which his head had rested and set it up as a monument at that spot and poured oil upon it as signifying honor, distinction and appreciation; **[R3966 : page 95]**

(2) He gave the place a name, calling it Beth-el, the house of God, in commemoration of the blessing.

But this was not enough: he said to himself, Although I have been a follower of the Lord, and am even now here because of my faith in the divine promise to Abraham, yet now that God has personally favored me with these assurances of his presence with me and his assistance along the journey of life and his ultimate fulfilment in me of all these promises, what should I render unto the Lord for all his benefits? He resolved that he would (3) make a vow, a covenant of fidelity to the Lord. It was this: Since God will be with me and will keep me in this way which I go, and provide me bread to eat and raiment to wear, so that I shall return hither again in peace, and in view of this promise he shall be my Lord, my God, which signifies that I shall be his servant, his creature. The stone set up as a monument served as a corroboration, a witness to the vow, and additionally Jacob vowed that of all that God gave him he would surely give a tenth part to the divine service.

We consider such a consecration of himself and of his income as the reasonable proper course on Jacob's part. The man or woman who receives blessings from the Lord or from anyone without

thought, desire and wish to make returns according to his ability, shows thereby his degradation, because surely every noble-minded person would be prompted to consecration by a realization of the Lord's favors and privileges. So the Apostle declares respecting the Spiritual Israelite, that we have received of the Lord exceedingly great and precious promises. Having come to this place where we are at the foot of the ladder and in touch therewith, and recipients of the blessings from heaven and the privilege of this association, we should consider it, he tells us, a reasonable service to present our bodies living sacrifices to him. – Rom. 12:1.

We should esteem it a great joy, a great privilege, to be the Lord's servants. We do not become his servants in order to get his blessings, but his blessings have been conferred upon us conditionally: we are pleased to present our bodies living sacrifices to his service. Jacob vowed one-tenth of his income to the Lord's service, and this proportion seems to have been in general recognized at that time and probably previously, as we know it was subsequently incorporated in the Mosaic Law. Abraham gave a tithe, one-tenth, of the spoils to Melchisedec, and the king of Sodom made a similar offering to Abraham, which the latter rejected, preferring to receive gifts from the Lord only.

Theoretically the Christian gives his all to the Lord, and theoretically the Lord accepts our all of time, talent, influence, money, all. But actually, when we consider the time necessary for rest and for the reasonable care of our earthly interests, we are fortunate indeed if we are able to give directly to the Lord one-tenth of our time. Similarly with all of our gifts, privileges and opportunities – so many of them are necessary to ourselves, our reasonable well being, the providing of things honest in the sight of all men, it is doubtful if very many, therefore, give to the Lord much more than one-tenth of all their substance. And surely if this was a command to natural men, we, as New Creatures, would feel ashamed to proffer the Lord less. We certainly should set apart at least one-tenth for the Lord, and then add thereto as much as

possible according to the Lord's blessing and the possibilities of the case. We, too, should set up pillars or memorials as marking this special blessing received of the Lord.

A provision has been made for us along this line by our Lord. Has he not provided the Memorial season, in which annually we are privileged to celebrate our Bethel? – that we are the house of God because with us is the Son of man, the Ladder, the connecting way between earth and heaven, between us and the heavenly Father. How earnest we should be to perpetuate this Memorial, and how we should appreciate the fact that its recurring lessons are amongst the most helpful that could possibly be our experience. And did not our Lord provide for us another Memorial, and set us the example in the use of it, too, when he symbolized his consecration to death by baptism into water? How glad we are that we can set up this Memorial also, that it is our privilege to be symbolically buried and symbolically raised as a manifestation and expression of our faith and our hope and our joy. Whoever neglects the vow of consecration, and whoever neglects to set up this Memorial, is thereby to this extent evidencing a carelessness and a deficiency in the spirit that is pleasing to the Lord; and in the same degree he fails to have the witness that he pleases the Lord and is making his calling and election sure. Let us, then, like Jacob, arise early. We may set up these memorials and make these vows of consecration. Those who have done these things early in their Christian experience – early after coming to the foot of the cross, the foot of the ladder – have received proportionately the greater blessing as they have gone on in life's pathway.
