

A NEW NAME – GOD-GIVEN

– GENESIS 32:9-12,22-30. – APRIL 14. –

Golden Text: – "Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." – Luke 10:20.

OUR last lesson saw Jacob en route for his Uncle Laban's home, a journey of about 500 miles. His subsequent experiences in the service of his uncle, and how he became a wealthy owner of flocks and herds, and the father of a large family, belong to the interim. The present lesson finds him nearing his old home. Remembering the anger of his brother Esau when they parted 20 years before, he sent at the hands of servants several valuable presents of cattle, sheep, etc., with the message that he was coming on in peace. In reply he learned that Esau with 400 mounted men was coming forth to meet him, and he feared that this meant an unkind reception. Our present lesson opens with Jacob's prayer to the Lord at this time when he was in fear of his brother. It is

THE FIRST RECORDED PRAYER OF THE BIBLE

Scholars have pronounced this a perfect prayer as measured by the standard of the Lord's prayer; for it seems to follow the same general lines: (1) Adoration to the Almighty; (2) humiliation and self-effacement in the presence of the Lord; (3) petition for divine care and protection; (4) repetition of the divine promises as the ground for faith and hope. The various parts of the prayer thus indicated are: (1) "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 do thee good: (2) I am unworthy of the least of all the mercies and all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff [without other possessions] I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two companies [referring to his large possessions of flocks and herds

and herdsmen, etc., which he had divided into two bands or companies]: (3) Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother; from the hand of Esau; for I fear him lest he come and smite me and the mother with the children [i.e. root and branch]: (4) And thou saidst I will surely be with thee, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude."

It cannot be claimed for Jacob nor for any of the ancient worthies (nor for anyone else for that matter) that they were perfect and that therefore the Lord favored them. The one thing that stands out sharply, distinctly, above any other thing in the character of Jacob, as in that of Abraham [R3969 : page 104] and of Isaac, is his faith. Let us remember that he did not live under the favored conditions which we enjoy of fellowship with the Lord through the Scriptures, through the holy Spirit and through communion with the brethren – that on the contrary he was alone in his faith. Nor had anything in particular been explained to him respecting the grand ultimate consummation of the divine plan as it is our privilege now to see this through the telescope of the divine Word and the illumination of the Spirit of Truth. He merely knew that a promise had been made to Abraham that seemed to imply the ultimate blessing of the world through his posterity, and his faith had grasped this promise, so that to him it had become a reality, the predominant power and influence in his life. For that promise he had endured and was still enduring, and confident even in the face of hostility, even though he trembled in fear of his greater antagonist – for by this time Esau, the possessor of Isaac's wealth and the lord over his servants, was known as the "prince of Edom."

CONFIRMED BY BETTER PROMISES

The lesson to us is that a still greater promise being left to us – that is to say, the same promise having further developed and divided into two parts, and the higher or spiritual feature having

been bestowed upon the Church of Christ – we who realize ourselves to be heirs of this same promise, and who now see its spiritual force and signification, have still more reason than had Jacob to humble ourselves before the Lord, to acknowledge our dependence upon him, to ask him for deliverance from the great enemy and from every foe to our best interests, and to plead his gracious promise, confirmed unto us in the death of Jesus our Lord. Ah, yes! the Apostle clearly indicates this when he says to us, "If ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." – Gal. 3:29.

Jacob indeed will come in as one of the heirs of the earthly phase of the blessing, but the distinguished honor of sitting in the throne has passed to the Spiritual Israel, and we who are now called according to the divine purpose should be very alert to make our calling and election sure; and still more intelligently and more fervently should we, who have now been brought nigh by the blood of Christ, glorify our Father in heaven in respect to the riches of his grace, to which he assures us we are welcome upon a manifestation of the necessary faith and obedience. Shall we not cry day and night unto the Lord respecting the exceeding great and precious promises given unto us, and our expectation of realizing them – that we may have grace and strength to overcome, to come off conquerors through him who loved us and bought us with his precious blood?

WRESTLING IN PRAYER

Jacob was not content merely to pray; he labored also, and set his affairs in the best possible order for the ordeal of the morrow and in arranging his company into two great bands. Then the prayer probably was continued, only a synoptical statement being given us. The particulars are not recorded, but apparently an angel of the Lord appeared to him in human form with some communication respecting his prayers and his fears. In his earnestness to have

the [R3970 : page 104] divine blessing Jacob laid personal hold upon the angel, urging a blessing – feeling that it was a matter of imperative need, that he could not be fit for the events of the morrow unless he had this blessing.

Jacob's experience here reminds us of our dear Redeemer's experiences in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he wrestled with strong cryings and tears, pleading with him who was able to save him out of death, out of the hands of the great enemy. Our Lord agonized for long hours and finally got the blessing. And so it was also previously in Jacob's case here narrated: he urged, he pleaded, he wrestled with the Lord for the thing which he knew the Lord had promised him – the divine blessing upon his home-coming and in respect to his future as a servant of God and an heir of the oath-bound promise. The entire procedure of the night is briefly summed up in a few words in our lesson, "They wrestled until the breaking of the day" – the angel apparently endeavoring to avoid giving him the blessing, and Jacob determined so much the more that the blessing was necessary and that he must have it. It was then that the angel touched Jacob's thigh, wrested the sinew. But in spite of all Jacob held on and got the blessing with the break of day.

We are not to suppose that God was averse to the giving of this blessing and that Jacob prevailed to secure it in opposition to the divine will. On the contrary, we are to understand that it was God's good pleasure to give the blessing. He had already intimated this; but that the blessing might be valuable to Jacob it was withheld for a time until he would more and more feel his need of it and cry out and struggle to obtain it, that when obtained it might be the more highly esteemed, and effect thereby the greater influence upon his heart and faith and future course. And it is so with our prayers. "The Father himself loveth you," is the Master's word; nevertheless, Jesus said we should pray and not faint, not grow weary, not lose our interest in the things desired if they are the things that God has indicated to be in harmony with his will.

If, for instance, we read in the Scriptures that the Lord is more pleased to give his holy Spirit to them that ask him than earthly parents are to give good gifts to their children, then it cannot be amiss for us to watch and pray with patience and continuance for this holy Spirit – that we might obtain this great blessing, the character-likeness of our Lord.

"THE TRIAL OF YOUR FAITH"

We have found that it was often by bringing us into severe trials, ordeals, putting us under crucial tests, that the Lord develops more and more our faith, our love, our trust, our hope in him. He would have us learn well our lesson, that without him we can do nothing, but that with his blessing and favor all things are ours, because we are Christ's and Christ is God's. Let us, then, in all the important junctures of life, be sure that we are seeking chiefly the divine will, as expressed in the divine promise, the Oath-Bound Covenant: let us seek it patiently, earnestly, persistently – let us wrestle with the Lord that thereby we may be made the stronger, that when the proper and advantageous experiences have been enjoyed the blessing will come – at **[R3970 : page 105]** the proper moment to do us the most good and in the manner that would be most helpful.

In some respects this return of Jacob to the promised land shadowed the coming return of his posterity, which is even now at hand. As a nation they are even now trembling for fear of extermination in all parts of the world; they know not when the blow will fall nor in what manner their interests will be injured, but those of them who are in the right attitude of heart toward God will, we believe, very soon come to this praying point. The Lord intimates this, saying respecting the day just before us, "I will pour upon them the spirit of prayer and of supplication, and they shall look upon me whom they pierced." (Zech. 12:10.) The result of this praying, supplicating, will be the blessing of the New

Covenant under which, with the Lord's favor, they will go on to the grand fulfilment of the gracious things already declared more than 3,000 years ago.

THE NEW NAME – A PRINCE WITH GOD

As a part of the blessing granted by the angel in the name of the Lord, Jacob's name was changed to Israel, explained to signify that he was a prince with God, or had great power with God, as exemplified by the fact that he had secured this blessing by the demonstration of great faith and loyalty and zeal. This name, Israel, is the one by which all his followers prefer to be known – they are Israelites. As the Gospel Church is termed in the Scriptures Spiritual Israel, and as the head of the Church is Christ, we see another parallel or foreshadowing by Jacob of Jesus – of Jesus' struggle and our Lord's ignominy in the garden. It was because our Lord overcame, because he exercised faith and obedience, that he indeed is the great Prince of the Lord, appointed the great Prince and Savior for the people.

Already Christ is the Prince of the Church, which in obedience to his call is seeking to walk in his steps, that they may be joint-heirs with him in the glorious Oath-Bound Covenant which he has inherited, just as the Israelites sought to follow Jacob and become heirs of the same promise. But as there were tests upon Jacob, so also there needed to be tests upon his people: and likewise as there were tests upon our Redeemer, so there must be tests upon all of his people, his followers, his Gospel Church. Many of the people of Natural Israel stumbled because of lack of faith – not holding on to the divine promise they were overcome by the spirit of the world, the spirit of selfishness, etc. Similarly today, in this harvest time of the Gospel age, we find the indications to be that many more have been called than will be chosen – than will be worthy of acceptance as footstep-followers of the Redeemer, the true Israel, the Spiritual Prince with God. As Jesus was the prevailing

Prince with God, so all of those whom he accepts as members of his body, his Church, must also have the same spirit and be, in the language of the Scriptures, "overcomers."

THE CHURCH'S NEW NAME

By his faith Jacob obtained a rank, a standing, amongst his posterity with his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham, and in olden times no Israelite would appropriate any of these three names – they were considered too sacred for others than the originals. The changing of Jacob's name reminds us of other similar changes: for instance, amongst our Lord's disciples Simon was renamed Peter, and again Saul of Tarsus was renamed Paul, and this gradually led to the custom prevalent throughout Christendom of giving to every convert a new name, a Christian name, and this principle was eventually applied to children of believers and ultimately to all children.

But God proposes a new name for his people – his Church – the Bride, the Lamb's wife. As Jesus was our Lord's name and he became the Christ, the Messiah, so all who become members of his body come under his new name, and are recognized of the Lord and may be recognized of each other as members of the Christ (Rev. 3:12); and again, the Lord, prophetically speaking of Christ, says, "This is the name whereby he shall be called, The Righteousness of Jehovah," (Jer. 23:6): and again, speaking of the Bride of Christ, we read, "This is the name by which she shall be called, The Righteousness of Jehovah." (Jer. 33:16.) The name of the Bridegroom is given to his Bride – "They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels." (Mal. 3:17.) And those who will get this new name, we may be sure, will all be called upon to demonstrate that they will be overcomers. They must all pass approval before the Lord for their faith and their persistency in holding to him and his gracious promise – the Oath-Bound Covenant.

"DO IT NOT, WORSHIP GOD"

The answer of the angel, when Jacob in turn asked for his name, reminds us of the words of the poet, –

"O! to be nothing, nothing –
To him let their voices be raised;
He is the fountain of blessing,
Yes, worthy is he to be praised."

The angel seemingly had no desire to flaunt his own name and have it handed down to posterity. He was content that he was the mouthpiece and representative of Jehovah God, and desirous that the Lord alone should have the honor and distinction of having conferred the blessing, and that the instrument through which the divine favor was extended might not be in evidence to detract from the glory of the Lord. Would that all of us who are the Lord's people could take exactly this unselfish view of our various opportunities to serve the Lord and his brethren – to be willing to be out of sight ourselves that all might the more clearly see that the blessings conferred are from the Lord alone. This thought is brought to our attention in Rev. 19:10, where John, as a representative of the Church, having heard and seen wonderful things, fell at the feet of the angel to worship him who had showed him these things. The command was, "See that thou do it not, for I am thy fellow-servant – worship God." So if there come to any of us a thought of doing homage to the Lord's messengers or servants through whom his blessing has been bestowed upon us it will be proper for him to give the admonition, "Do it not, worship God"; and in any event it **[R3971 : page 105]** would be our duty to fully recognize that our blessings come not from any human being but from God, however much he may use human instrumentalities in conveying his blessings. He alone is to be honored and revered and appreciated as the Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift. – James 1:17.
