

Lesson 13 JACOB'S EXILE AND RETURN

READING: Genesis 31, 32 and 33

AIM: To show how God was with Jacob.

1. BACKGROUND

Strengthened by his remarkable dream and assurance of God's protection at Bethel, Jacob continued his journey to Padan-aram and found the family of his uncle, Laban. At a well outside Haran Jacob met shepherds who watered their flocks, Jacob learned that they knew Laban and was informed that **"Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep"**. Jacob removed the stone from the mouth of the well and watered the sheep she tended, and then made himself known to Rachel. Jacob was welcomed by Laban and invited to stay with the family.

Laban had two daughters, Leah and Rachel, Rachel was "beautiful" and Jacob loved her deeply. He agreed to work for Laban for seven years as dowry for his younger daughter Rachel and to him the tie seemed "but a few days, for the love he had to her".

At the end of the period, however, Laban gave him Leah, saying that the younger should not be given before the elder. Jacob served another seven years for Rachel (although it seems that Jacob married Rachel shortly after Leah and then spent the seven years additional labour afterwards).

Laban found that he prospered so long as Jacob worked for him but Jacob found Laban a hard taskmaster. During 20 years in Padan-aram Jacob passed through a time of discipline with unpleasant incidents. Jacob had disappointments but the lessons he learned moulded his character. For God watched over him and protected him from Laban's wrath and the envy of Laban's sons.

2. JACOB'S RETURN – Gen 31

God commanded Jacob to return to his people in Canaan. He obeyed and left Padan-aram with his family and possessions, unknown to Laban, because he was afraid Laban would try to stop him. After three days Laban discovered his absence and followed. He was unwilling to lose the services of such a valuable assistant.

God intervened in a dream saying to Laban, "Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad". Unbeknown to Jacob, Rachel had stolen her father's household images. Because of God's warning Laban refrained from harming Jacob. Jacob recalled Laban's many injustices and said **"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"**.

Jacob and Laban made a mutual covenant, erecting a heap of stones as a memorial to their solemn agreement that they would not at any future time harm one another. They parted friends and Laban returned to his home. Jacob offered sacrifice full of joy and gratitude, then hastened towards Canaan.

3. JACOB PREPARES TO MEET ESAU – Gen. 32. 1-23

But now Jacob feared Esau. Hearing of Esau's approach with 400 men, he remembered their last meeting. Although he had not yet learned the lesson of complete trust in God, he had not forgotten the example and precepts of Isaac his father. He approached God in prayer, admitting his unworthiness and asked for help (Gen. 32:9-12). This was in accord with God's will, for He desires His servants at all times to approach Him in humility, confessing their sins and asking for encouragement and guidance.

Jacob sent in advance a generous present of various kinds of cattle. This was an Eastern custom. If the gift was refused it was a sign of enmity. We note Jacob's care in grouping his family; first the handmaids with their children, then Leah and her children, and lastly his much loved wife Rachel with Joseph. At that time Jacob had 11 children (for Benjamin was not yet born). He sent them forward across the brook **Jabbok** and remained alone.

4. **JACOB WRESTLES WITH AN ANGEL – Gen 32:24-32**

At this time of deepest anxiety for Jacob, and event of great importance happened to him.

“And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day”(Gen. 32:24)

The one whom Jacob wrestled was an angel. They continued all night, wrestling, the angel trying to break the hold that Jacob had on him.

At last, the angel smote the thigh of Jacob and put it out of joint, causing Jacob to limp. Yet still Jacob refused to let him go. At last the light of morning was seen. Again the angel requested that Jacob let him go. But Jacob replied **“I will not let thee go except thou bless me”**.

The blessing consisted of changing Jacob's name to Israel, from “Supplanter” to “Prince with God”. The angel said moreover; **“As a prince thou has striven with God and prevailed, and thou shalt certainly prevail with men”**.

Jacob called the name of the place **“Peniel”** which means “face of God”. He said, “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved”. He “saw” God revealed through the angel, for no man has seen God Himself at any time.

The record says, “As he passed over Peniel, the sun rose upon him”. Thus, a new day commenced, one that put new heart into Jacob. For Jacob learned that it was only by yielding himself entirely to God's will that he would be a prince and ruler with God (Hosea 12:1-6). Jacob now became a willing servant like Abraham and Isaac. He, too, had supreme faith in the promises that God renewed to him. (Gen. 35:12; 48:3-4).

5. **JACOB REACHES CANAAN – RECONCILIATION WITH ESAU – Gen. 33**

Jacob continued his journey and was met by Esau with his 400 men carrying spears and swords. He had grouped his own family in the best way to impress Esau and secure their safety. He bowed to the ground seven times as he approached Esau. To his great relief “Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him”(Gen. 33:4)

God had changed the mind of Esau towards Jacob. Esau offered his protection to Jacob for the rest of the journey, but Jacob refused and said he would proceed “softly” because of the little children and the herds with their young. He showed consideration for both animal and human life.

Jacob at length reached **Shechem** in Canaan, and settled with his family and flocks. Shechem itself was the city, and “Shalem” meaning “in peace” the state of mind in which Jacob found himself when he arrived there (see Gen. 33:18)

Jacob bought part of a field from the “children of Hamor” on which to pitch his tent. Like his grandfather Abraham, though promised the land for an everlasting possession, Jacob received none of it for an inheritance (Acts 7:5). They both had to buy small portions as the need arose.

6. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Rebekah was told that Jacob and Esau represented “two nations” and “two manner of people” (Gen. 25:23). Jacob’s life is representative of the nation of Israel. They were God’s “firstborn” nation, they had been driven from their land and suffered in exile but when Christ returns they will enjoy prosperity and peace in the Land of Promise.

If Jacob represents Israel, then Esau represents those who are not Israelites, that is the Gentiles. Jacob found reconciliation with Esau, and settled in peace at Shechem. So, in like manner, the new Day that is approaching (Acts 17:31, Zech. 14:1; Mal. 4:1) Jew and Gentile will be reconciled in the Kingdom to be established and the Jew shall, at last, find peace.

The life of Jacob teaches the truth of the comforting words of Isaiah 54:17. They are words we can apply to ourselves if we give ourselves to God. Though we might experience trials, reverses, sufferings, fears, anxieties, as did Jacob, God will see that we will ultimately win through if we exhibit Jacob’s faith.

REFERENCE LIBRARY

“The Ways of Providence”, chapter 6

“Elpis Israel”, part 2, chapter 3.

“Wrestling Jacob”, chapters 6 to 12.

“Scriptural Coincidences”, part 1, chapter 7.

QUESTIONS

1. How long did Jacob serve Laban and why?
2. Describe what happened when Jacob wrestled with an angel at Peniel.
3. Briefly describe the character of Jacob.
4. What hardships did Jacob suffer in Padan-aram and what lessons did this teach him?
5. Where and in what circumstances was Jacob’s name changed to Israel?
6. Explain how Jacob and Esau represented two nations.