

JACOB: TO PADDAN-ARAM

Jacob, by his vow, was trying to "bargain" with God? What is your conclusion in regard to the motive back of this vow?

65. What reason have we for saying that Jacob's election to the Messianic Line was not arbitrary on God's part?
66. What is the derivation of the word "holiness"?
67. What do we mean by the attributes of God?
68. Where is the only Scripture in which the title "Holy Father" occurs, and to whom does it refer?
69. What does Jesus have to say about calling any man "father" in a spiritual sense? Where is His statement found in Scripture?
70. What are some of the titles which churchmen have arrogated to themselves for the purpose of clothing themselves with priestly and doctoral dignity?
71. What attributes does the Holiness of God include?
72. Why do we say that Absolute Justice is the over-all attribute of God to which even His love is subordinated? How does the doctrine of the Atonement prove this to be true?
73. Explain Otto's teaching with respect to the *dreadfulness* of God. What Scripture passages support this view?
74. Why do we say that in God absolute justice and holiness are practically identical?
75. What are the religious lessons to be learned from the story of Jacob's ladder?
76. What truths does this story reveal to us regarding the life and ministry of Christ?

PART FORTY-ONE

THE STORY OF JACOB: HIS EXPERIENCES IN PADDAN-ARAM

(Genesis 29:1—31:16)

The Biblical Account

1. Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the children of the east. 2 And he looked, and, behold, a well in the field, and, lo, three flocks of sheep lying there by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks; and the stone upon the well's mouth was great. 3 And thither were all the flocks gathered: and they rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep, and put the stone again upon the well's mouth in its place. 4 And Jacob said unto them, My brethren, whence are ye? And they said, Of Haran are we. 5 And he said unto them, Know ye Laban the son of Nabor? And they said, We know him. 6 And he said unto them, Is it well with him? And they said, It is well: and, behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep. 7 And he said, Lo, it is yet high day, neither is it time that the cattle should be gathered together; water ye the sheep, and go and feed them. 8 And they said, We cannot, until all the flocks be gathered together, and they roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep. 9 While he was yet speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep; for she kept them. 10 And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. 11 And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept. 12 And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother, and that he was Rebekah's son: and she ran and told her father.

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13 And it came to pass, when Laban heard the tidings of Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house. And he told Laban all these things. 14 And Laban said to him, Surely thou art my bone and my flesh. And he abode with him the space of a month. 15 And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be? 16 And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 And Leah's eyes were tender; but Rachel was beautiful and well-favored. 18 And Jacob loved Rachel; and he said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter. 19 And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me. 20 And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.

21 And Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her. 22 And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. 23 And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him; and he went in unto her. 24 And Laban gave Zilpah his handmaid unto his daughter Leah for a handmaid. 25 And it came to pass in the morning that, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me? 26 And Laban said, It is not so done in our place, to give the younger before the first-born. 27 Fulfil the week of this one, and we will give thee the other also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years. 28 And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to

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wife. 29 And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her handmaid. 30 And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years.

31 And Jehovah saw that Leah was hated, and he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. 32 And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben: for she said, Because Jehovah hath looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me. 33 And she conceived again, and bare a son: and said, Because Jehovah hath heard that I am hated, he hath therefore given me this son also: and she called his name Simeon. 34 And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have borne him three sons: therefore was his name called Levi. 35 And she conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, This time will I praise Jehovah: therefore she called his name Judah; and she left off bearing.

1. And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and she said unto Jacob, Give me children or else I die. 2 And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? 3 And she said, Behold, my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; that she may bear upon my knees, and I also may obtain children by her. 4 And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife: and Jacob went in unto her. 5 And Bilhah conceived, and bare Jacob a son. 6 And Rachel said, God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son: therefore called she his name Dan. 7 And Bilhah Rachel's handmaid conceived again, and bare Jacob a second son. 8 And Rachel said, With mighty wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and have prevailed: and she called his name Naphtali.

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9 *When Leah saw that she had left off bearing, she took Zilpah her handmaid, and gave her to Jacob to wife. 10 And Zilpah Leah's handmaid bare Jacob a son. 11 And Leah said, Fortunate! and she called his name Gad. 12 And Zilpah Leah's handmaid bare Jacob a second son. 13 And Leah said, Happy am I! for the daughters will call me happy: and she called his name Asher.*

14 *And Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest, and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them unto his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, Give me, I pray thee, of thy son's mandrakes. 15 And she said unto her, Is it a small matter that thou hast taken away my husband? and wouldest thou take away my sons' mandrakes also? And Rachel said, Therefore he shall lie with thee to-night for thy son's mandrakes. 16 And Jacob came from the field in the evening; and Leah went out to meet him, and said, Thou must come in unto me; for I have surely hired thee with my son's mandrakes. And he lay with her that night 17 And God hearkened unto Leah, and she conceived and bare Jacob a fifth son. 18 And Leah said, God hath given me my hire, because I gave my handmaid to my husband: and she called his name Issachar. 19 And Leah conceived again, and bare a sixth son to Jacob. 20 And Leah said, God hath endowed me with a good dowry; now will my husband dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons: and she called his name Zebulun. 21 and afterwards she bare a daughter, and called her name Dinah. 22 And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. 23 And she conceived, and bare a son: and said, God hath taken away my reproach: 24 and she called his name Joseph, saying, Jehovah add to me another son.*

25 *And it came to pass, when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country. 26 Give me my wives and my children for whom I have*

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served thee, and let me go: for thou knowest my service wherewith I have served thee. 27 And Laban said unto him, If now I have found favor in thine eyes, tarry: for I have divined that Jehovah hath blessed me for thy sake. 28 And he said, Appoint me thy wages, and I will give it. 29 And he said unto him, Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle have fared with me. 30 For it was little which thou hadst before I came, and it hath increased unto a multitude; and Jehovah hath blessed thee whithersoever I turned: and now when shall I prove for mine own house also? 31 And he said, What shall I give thee? And Jacob said, Thou shalt not give me aught: if thou wilt do this thing for me, I will again feed thy flock and keep it. 32 I will pass through all thy flock to-day, removing from thence, every speckled and spotted one, and every black one among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats: and of such shall be my hire. 33 So shall my righteousness answer for me hereafter, when thou shalt come concerning my hire that is before thee: every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and black among the sheep, that, if found with me, shall be counted stolen. 34 And Laban said, Behold, I would it might be according to thy word. 35 And he removed that day the he-goats that were ringstreaked and spotted, and all the she-goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white in it, and all the black ones among the sheep, and gave them into the hand of his sons: 36 and he set three days' journey betwixt himself and Jacob: and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks.

37 And Jacob took him rods of fresh poplar, and of the almond and of the plane-tree; and peeled white streaks in them, and made the white appear which was in the rods. 38 And he set the rods which he had peeled over against the flocks in the gutters in the watering-troughs where the flocks came to drink; and they conceived when they came to drink. 39 And the flocks conceived before the

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rods, and the flocks brought forth ring-streaked, speckled, and spotted. 40 And Jacob separated the lambs, and set the faces of the flocks toward the ringstreaked and all the black in the flock of Laban: and he put his own droves apart, and put them not unto Laban's flock. 41 And it came to pass, whensoever the stronger of the flock did conceive, that Jacob laid the rods before the eyes of the flock in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods; 42 but when the flock were feeble, he put them not in: so the feebler were Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's. 43 And the man increased exceedingly, and had large flocks, and maid-servants and men-servants, and camels and asses.

1. And he heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's; and of that which was our father's hath he gotten all this glory. 2 And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold it was not toward him as beforetime. 3 And Jehovah said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee. 4 And Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field unto his flock; 5 and said unto them, I see your father's countenance, that it is not toward me as beforetime; but the God of my father hath been with me. 6 And ye know that with all my power I have served your father. 7 And your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times; but God suffered him not to hurt me. 8 If he said thus, The speckled shall be thy wages; then all the flock bare speckled; and if he said thus, The ringstreaked shall be thy wages; then bare all the flock ringstreaked. 9 Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me. 10 And it came to pass at the time that the flock conceived, that I lifted up mine eyes, and saw in a dream, and, behold, the he-goats which leaped upon the flock were ringstreaked, speckled, and grizzled. 11 And the angel of God said unto me in the dream, Jacob: and I said, Here am I. 12 And he said, Lift up now thine eyes, and

see: all the he-goats which leap upon the flock are ring-streaked, speckled, and grizzled: for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee. 13 I am the God of Beth-el, where thou anointedst a pillar, where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy nativity. 14 And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? 15 Are we not accounted by him as foreigners? for he hath sold us, and hath also quite devoured our money. 16 For all the riches which God hath taken away from our father, that is ours and our children's: now then, whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do.

1. *Jacob's Meeting with Rachel* (29:1-12). (1) Note that *Jacob went on his journey*: literally, he *lifted up his feet*: "a graphic description of traveling." "Inspired by new hopes and conscious of loftier aims than when he fled from Beersheba, the lonely fugitive departed from Bethel" (PCG, 356). After the night of the dream-vision, Jacob "resumed his way with a light heart and elastic step; for tokens of the Divine favor tend to quicken the discharge of duty (Neh. 8:10)" (Jamieson, CECG, 201). (2) "*The land of the children of the east.*" His destination was *Paddan-Aram* (in the A.S.V. and the R.S.V., *Padan-Aram* in the A.V.), the homeland of Rebekah (Gen. 25:20), and the abode of Laban (Gen. 28:2-7), called the "field of Aram" by Hosea (12:12; A.V., "country of Syria"). Arabia, Mesopotamia, and the entire region beyond the Euphrates, are by the Bible writers included under the general designation, "the East" (cf. Job 1:3, Judg. 6:3, 1 Ki. 4:30). In the present instance, Mesopotamia is the country especially referred to. *Paddan-Aram* was a district of Mesopotamia; it is described as the large plain surrounded by mountains, in which the town of Haran was situated. This region was closely associated

with the history of the ancient Hebrew people. Abraham's family had settled there, and thither the patriarch sent his steward, Eliezer, to secure a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:10ff.; 25:20), and now we find Jacob going there to find a wife (and secondarily to escape the revenge threatened by Esau his brother). (3) *The well of Haran*. On arriving in the area, Jacob came upon a well "in the field," that is, in the open field for the use of flocks, and covered at the time of his arrival with a huge stone: "*and, lo, three flocks of sheep were lying there by it.*" This, we are told, was a rather common Oriental scene (cf. Gen. 24:11, Exo. 2:16). This well in the open country evidently was distinct from the well at which Eliezer's caravan halted. The latter was a well used by the village maidens, situated in front of the town, and approached by steps (cf. 24:16), but this was in the open field for use primarily by the flocks, and at the time of Jacob's arrival was covered with a huge stone.

"There is a rude etiquette (in the Eastern country) which requires the chiefs to be foremost in all hardships which they and their followers encounter. So also the fact that Laban's daughters were keeping the flocks, and Jacob's mother carrying water from the well, and other similar examples, do not contradict the customs of wealthy Eastern shepherds. And who that has traveled much in this country has not often arrived at a well in the heat of the day which was surrounded by numerous flocks of sheep waiting to be watered. I once saw such a scene in the burning plains of northern Syria. Half-naked, fierce-looking men were drawing up water in leather buckets; flock after flock was brought up, watered, and went away; and after all the men had ended their work, then several women and girls brought up their flocks and drew water for them. Thus it was with Jethro's daughters when Moses stood up and aided them; and thus, no doubt, it would have been with Rachel, if Jacob had not rolled away the

stone and watered her sheep. I have frequently seen wells closed up with large stones, though in this part of the country it is not commonly done, because water is not so scarce and precious. It is otherwise, however, in the dreary deserts. Cisterns are very generally covered over with a large slab, having a round hole in it large enough to let down the leather bucket or earthen jar. Into this hole a heavy stone is thrust, often such as to require the united strength of two or three shepherds to remove. The same is seen occasionally over *wells* of 'living water'; but where they are large and the supply abundant no such precaution is needed. It was either at one of these cisterns, or less abundant and more precious wells, that Jacob met Rachel; and being a stout man, nearly seventy years of age, he was able to remove the stone and water the flock" (Thomson, LB, 589). There is nothing in this story to indicate that the city of Haran was within proximity of this well: as a matter of fact, when Jacob accosted the shepherds, he learned that they had come *from Haran*. (It should be noted here that the distance which Jacob had traveled, from Bethel to this spot, was some 400 miles: this might rightly be called the spatial gap between the first two verses of this chapter.) Evidently Laban was not a city-dweller, but a nomad sheik; the life that is depicted here is everywhere that of the desert.

Jacob then inquired of the shepherds whether they knew Laban "the son of Nahor," *i.e.*, the *grandson*, Laban's father having been Bethuel, who, however, here, as in ch. 24, remains in the background, at least is passed over as a person of no importance in the family (cf. 24:53, 55). By inquiry of the shepherds, Jacob learned that his relatives in the vicinity of Haran were "well." This prompted him to inquire of these shepherds why they were idling there during the best part of the day, instead of watering their flocks and sending them back to pasture. "Jacob's object evidently was to get these shepherds out of the way, in

order that his introduction to his fair cousin might take place in private, and the conversation relative to their respective families might not be heard by strangers" (Jamieson, CECG, 202; also Lange, Murphy, Keil). Or was his attitude here due to "the prudent and industrious habit of mind which "shone forth so conspicuously in himself and which instinctively caused him to frown upon laziness and inactivity" (Starke, Bush, Kalisch)? "From the middle of v. 2 the words are parenthetical, the watering of the flocks not having taken place till Rachel had arrived (v. 9) and Jacob had uncovered the well (v. 10)" (Whitelaw, PCG, 356). The shepherds replied: "We cannot, until," etc., v. 8: "in order to prevent the consequences of too frequent exposure in places where water is scarce, it is not only covered and secured, but it is customary to have all the flocks collected around the well before the covering is removed in the presence of the owner, or one of his representatives; and it was for this reason that those who were reposing at the well of Haran with the three flocks were waiting the arrival of Rachel" (CECG, 202). "Jacob is puzzled by the leisurely ways of these Eastern herdsmen, whom he ironically supposes to have ceased work for the day. He is soon to show them how things should be done, careless of the conventions which they plead as an excuse" (ICCG, 382). *The content of chapters 29, 30, 31, put Jacob in the important years of his life, learning in the school of experience.*

V. 9—Note well Rachel *the shepherdess* (cf. Exo. 2:16). It is customary among the Arabs of Sinai, that the virgin daughters drive the herds to the pasture. "Thus Jacob had reached his objective at or near Haran, and another famous and much-loved Biblical romance that the reader must read for himself gets under way" (Kraeling, BA, 83). When Jacob saw Rachel for the first time, *he rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock* which she was shepherding. As this was a stone of

no slight dimensions, how account for Jacob's strength? Surely the speculation advanced by Dillman, Gunkel, *et al*, that this was "a feat of strength" which "belonged to a more primitive legend, in which Jacob figured as a giant" (cf. 32:26) is utterly absurd. "As Rachel came up in the meantime, he [Jacob] was so carried away by the feelings of relationship, possibly by a certain love at first sight, that he rolled the stone away from the well, watered her flock, and after kissing her, introduced himself as her cousin ("brother," *i.e.*, relation of her father) and Rebekah's son. What the other shepherds thought of all this, is passed over as indifferent to the purpose of the narrative, and the friendly reception of Jacob by Laban is related immediately afterwards" (BCOTP, 285). "The strong impression that the beautiful Rachel made upon her cousin Jacob is manifested in two ways. He thinks himself powerful enough to roll the stone from the mouth of the cistern out of love to her, and disregards the possibility that the trial might fail. At the same time, too, he boldly disregards the common rule of the shepherds present. Rachel's appearance made him eager, as formerly Rebekah's appearance even the old Eliezer, when he took out the bracelets before he knew her. The power of beauty is also recognized here upon sacred ground. Tuch thinks that the united exertion of the shepherds would have been necessary, and the narrative, therefore, boasts of a Samson-like strength in Jacob. But there is a difference between Samson-like strength and the heroic power inspired by love" (Lange, CDHCG, 528). To this Gosman adds (*ibid.*) "Perhaps, however, there was mingling with this feeling the joy which naturally springs from finding himself among his kindred, after the long, lonely and dangerous journey through the desert." "A great stone was over the well where the sheep were watered, and the men who were there were waiting for other shepherds to come and help them roll it aside: but Jacob went and rolled it aside

himself. Why? Because he had met Rachel; and in contact with Rachel, Jacob from the first moment was a different man" (Bowie, IBG, 697). "What of the fact that Jacob rolls away singlehanded a stone which required the united efforts of the rest? That is to be explained partly by the fact that he was naturally very strong, then partly by a mixture of two facts: his joy at finding his kinfolks and his joy at finding such a pretty cousin stirs him greatly and makes him strong. It may be that we have here a Biblical instance of love at first sight, although even that had more fitly find mention in connection with the next verse. But to talk only of that love and to make Jacob act like a young fellow who tries to impress his lady-love by feats of strength is just a bit shallow by way of interpretation. Life, here, as usual, was rather a complex of various motives that surged strongly in Jacob's heart. The text by its threefold repetition of the phrase, 'of his mother's brother Laban,' shows on what his thoughts dwell at the moment. It has remained for Gunkel and men of his type to ascribe to the narrative the attempt to make out Jacob to be a man of Herculean strength, a gigantic fellow—fabulous elements in the story. Such conclusions in reference to Jacob are, to say the least, most fantastic and far-fetched" (Leupold, EG, 788). (Note here, v. 10, the threefold use of the phrase, "his mother's brother." Was this repetition for the purpose of putting the greatest possible stress on the fact that Jacob had met with his own relatives, with "his bone and his flesh" (v. 14)? "The threefold repetition of this phrase does not prove that Jacob acted in all this purely as a cousin. The phrase is the historian's, and Jacob had not yet informed Rachel of his name" (PCG, 357). According to the practice in Eastern lands, the term "brother" is extended to include such degrees of relationship as those of uncle, cousin, or nephew. In v. 12, for instance, "brother" is equal to nephew: cf. Gen. 14:16, 24:48).

Rachel's appearance on the scene stirs Jacob emotionally to the depths of his soul, and so impels him to roll away the stone, water the sheep, and then *kiss the young woman and burst into tears*, v. 11. Was this just a "cousinly" demonstration of affection? We can hardly think so. "Allowing for the fact that in those days, among a different people, a kiss of cousins was a proper greeting, there is little doubt that Rachel was taken quite unawares; and may well have been astonished, for as yet she knew nothing of this strong shepherd's identity. The more natural procedure would have been to explain first who he was, then to give the kiss of greeting. The reverse of the procedure indicates how his glad emotions ran away with him. No man will determine how much of this emotion was plain joy at seeing a cousin and how much incipient love for pretty Rachel, and Jacob himself, perhaps, at the moment would have been least able to make an accurate analysis of what his heart actually felt at the occasion. We can hardly go wrong in claiming to detect a trace of love at first sight" (EG, 788). The threefold expression, *mother's brother*, v. 10, "shows that he acted thus as cousin (rolling the stone from the well's mouth, etc.). As such he was allowed to kiss Rachel openly, as a brother his sister (Song of Sol. 8:1 [Knobell]). Yet his excitement betrays him even here, since he did not make known his relationship with her until afterwards" (Lange, CDHCG, 528). Moreover, the strength of his emotion caused him *to lift up his voice and weep*, that is, to weep openly, to burst into tears, "not a dishonorable or unmanly thing for the Oriental then or now, for he is a man inclined to make a greater display of his emotions" (EG, 789). Jacob wept, "partly for joy at finding his relatives (cf. 43:30; 45:2, 14, 15); partly in grateful acknowledgement of God's kindness in conducting him to his mother's brother's house" (PCG, 357). Note the Jewish "traditions" concerning this experience of Jacob: "*and wept*. That he

had not been fortunate enough to marry her in his youth (Sforno). Because he foresaw through the Holy Spirit that she would not be buried with him. Another reason is, because he came to her destitute, unlike Eliezer who had come for his mother laden with riches. The reason for his state of destitution was, Eliphaz, Esau's son pursued him to slay him on his father's orders; but overcome with pity he refrained, yet being unable to disobey his father, he compromised on Jacob's suggestion, by taking all that he had, since 'a poor man is regarded as dead' (Rashi)" (SC, 169). (These assumptions strike the present writer as "hitting a new high in absurdity"). We must agree with Skinner that Jacob wept aloud "'after the demonstrative fashion of the Orient,' tears of joy at the happy termination of his journey" (ICCG, 382). The following description of the scene seems to be complete and accurate: "The encounter between Jacob and the local shepherds is a model of effective characterization. The traveler is excited and talkative after his long journey, whereas the herdsmen are composed, almost taciturn: they act as if each word were just too much trouble. True to an ageless pattern, the prospective suitor is inspired to a display of superhuman prowess at the very first sight of Rachel. He also appears to be more affectionate than one would think proper under the circumstances. Yet Jacob's impulsive kiss—a detail that Calvin attributed to a redactional slip on the part of Moses (cf. von Rad)—need not to have been out of tune with the mores of the times. We know from the Nuzi records, which so often mirror conditions in the Har(r)an area—and hence also in the patriarchal circle—that women were subject to fewer formal restraints than was to be the norm later on in the Near East as a whole" (ABG, 223). At this point in the story Jacob revealed his identity to Rachel and "she ran and told her father." "When the identity of Jacob is revealed to Rachel, she makes haste to impart the welcome news to

her father, not like Rebekah to her mother. In fact, Rebekah's mother is not even mentioned in these narratives and may already have been dead" (EG, 789).

2. *Jacob's Double Marriage* (29:13-30).

The Meeting with Laban. When Laban heard of Jacob's presence, "*he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house.*" "That Jacob made the whole journey on foot might have caused suspicion in the mind of Laban. But he is susceptible of nobler feelings, as is seen from the subsequent narration (31:24), although he is generally governed by selfish motives" (Lange, CDHCG, 528). Skinner is not so lenient: "The effusive display of affection, perhaps not wholly disinterested, is characteristic of Laban, cf. 24:29ff." (ICCG, 382). And Jacob "told Laban all these things," that is, all the matters related in chapters 27 and 28: "if Jacob came as a godly man and one repentant of his recent deceit, as we have every reason to believe that he was, then he could not do otherwise than relate the direct and the more remote reasons for his coming" (EG, 790). At any rate, the recital conveyed to Laban full proof of the newcomer's identity, eliciting his response, "*Surely thou art my bone and my flesh.*" The relation as acknowledged by Laban here could hardly have been anything more than blood relationship (consanguinity). And so Jacob abode with Laban "the space of a month." By this time, in all likelihood, Laban "had discerned that in Jacob he would have a very competent shepherd. No doubt Jacob began to serve in this capacity at once. His faithfulness and industry were immediately apparent. A measure of selfishness enters into Laban's proposal without a doubt. But most likely it is a compound of honest and selfish motives. The good features in it are that he wishes to bind a relative to himself, especially as this relative is unusually competent. Besides, he wants to arrive at a definite understanding as soon as possible in order to

obviate future misunderstandings. Furthermore, it behooves him as the elder to steer toward a definite agreement. Each of these good motives had an admixture of selfishness, for Laban was basically a selfish and a tricky man. No doubt, he was planning to gain this competent young man as a son-in-law. Laban must have anticipated the proposal that was actually made. Perhaps Laban had noticed that Jacob had fallen violently in love, and now Laban hoped that if he let Jacob set the terms, Jacob's newborn love would incline to make a generous proposal" (EG, 791-792). It must be noted too that Jacob in explaining the cause of his journey (v. 13) must have explained how it was that his poor appearance had come about, in view of the fact that he was the son of the rich Isaac.

We now discover that Laban had *two* daughters, the elder named Leah, and the younger Rachel. We are told that Leah's eyes were "weak," that is, lacking the lustre (fire) regarded as the height of beauty in Oriental women. "Eyes which are not clear and lustrous: to the Oriental, but especially to the Arabian, black eyes, full of life and fire, clear and expressive, dark eyes, are considered the principal part of female beauty. Such eyes he loves to compare with those of the gazelle" (Lange, *ibid.*, p. 528). Leah's eyes were tender, but Rachel was beautiful and well-favored, beautiful as to her form, and beautiful as to her countenance: "thus the passage indirectly says that Leah's *form* was beautiful." We are told now unequivocally that Jacob *loved* Rachel; hence, not being in a position to pay the purchase price (the customary dowry, or presents), he offered to serve Laban seven years for her. (We must remember also that his situation with respect to Esau compelled him to remain for some time with Laban). "The assent on the part of Laban cannot be accounted for from the custom of selling daughters to husbands, for it cannot be shown that the purchase of wives was a general custom

at that time; but is to be explained solely on the ground of Laban's selfishness and avarice, which came out still more plainly afterwards" (BCOTP, 285-286). It must be recalled, however, that the bestowing of costly presents on the prospective bride and her parents was a custom of the time (cf. Eliezer and Rebekah and her parents, 24:53). So it was that Jacob served seven years for Rachel "*and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.*" The inspired writer tells us that Laban agreed to Jacob's proposal on the ground that he would rather give Rachel to him (even though this would be giving the younger first?) than to a stranger; a custom, we are told, that still prevails among the Bedouins, the Druses, and other Eastern tribes. "A perfectly worthless excuse for if this had really been the custom in Haran as in ancient India and elsewhere, he ought to have told Jacob before" (BCOTP, 286). "As to the particular term of seven years, it seems to have been regarded in early times as a full and complete period of service (cf. Exo. 21:2). Even after betrothal, the intercourse of the parties is restricted. The Arabs will not allow them to see each other, but the Hebrews were not so stringent, nor, perhaps, the people in Mesopotamia. At all events, with Jacob the time went rapidly away; for even severe and difficult duties become light when love is the spring of action" (CECG, 203).

Laban's Deceit. When the time of service was fulfilled, Jacob asked for his reward, that is, the woman he loved. Now "Laban's character begins to unfold itself as that of a man ostensibly actuated by the most honorable motives, but at heart a selfish schemer, always ready with some plausible pretext for his nefarious conduct (cf. vv. 19, 26). His apparently generous offer proves a well-laid trap for Jacob, whose love for Rachel has not escaped the notice of his shrewd kinsman. . . . Laban proceeds to the execution of his long meditated *coup*. He himself arranges the marriage feast (cf. Judg. 14:10), inviting *all the men*

of the place, with a view doubtless to his self-exculpation (v. 26). The substitution of Leah for Rachel was rendered possible by the custom of bringing the bride to the bridegroom veiled (24:65). To have thus gotten rid of the unprepossessing Leah for a handsome price, and to retain his nephew's services for another seven years (v. 27) was a master-stroke of policy in the eyes of a man like Laban" (Skinner, ICCG, 383). (Note again Gen. 24:65. Does this mean that Rebekah set this fashion for brides in the patriarchal households? The law of proper clothing under the Mosaic Law is found in Deut. 22:5). When Jacob protested indignantly this deception which his uncle had perpetrated, the latter hid behind the specious rationalization, "To give the younger before the first-born is not done in our place," that is, in our society: a clear case in which that which was *legally right* was at the same time *morally wrong*: the wrong was not in the fact but in the *deception*. (In SC, p. 171, v. 26 here is explained thus: "The people here would not let me keep my word," Rashi). It should be noted, in this connection, that Jacob had been very explicit in this matter v. 18, but to no avail. "Jacob was so very explicit because he knew Laban's cunning. Therefore he did not say simply, 'Rachel,' but 'Rachel *thy daughter*.' Nor could Laban deceive him by changing Leah's name to Rachel: it must be 'thy *younger daughter*.' But it was of no avail; Laban deceived him after all" (SC, 170). But Laban had no scruples about driving even a harder bargain, vv. 27, 28: Fulfil the seven days of the wedding festival for Leah, said he, and *we will give thee* ("then the townspeople will agree") *the other also*, that is, Rachel, with the understanding that you will serve me yet another seven years. "For the bridegroom to break up the festivities would, of course, be a gross breach of decorum, and Jacob has no alternative but to fall in with Laban's new proposal and accept Rachel on his terms" (ICCG, 384). "To satisfy Jacob he promised

to give him Rachel in a week if he would serve him seven years longer. To this Jacob consented, and eight days later Jacob was wedded to the woman he loved" (UBG, 638). Laban may have proposed this to "satisfy" Jacob, but he certainly did not lose anything by the deal. "Laban's success is for the moment complete; but in the alienation of both his daughters, and their fidelity to Jacob at a critical time (31:14ff.), he suffered a just retribution for the unscrupulous assertion of his paternal rights" (ICCG, 384).

"Vv. 21-30: Jacob is betrayed into marrying Leah, and on consenting to serve another seven years obtains Rachel also. He claims his expected reward when due. 22-24: *Made a feast*. The feast in the house of the bride's father seems to have lasted seven days, at the close of which the marriage was completed. But the custom seems to have varied according to the circumstances of the bridegroom. Jacob had no house of his own to which to conduct the bride. *In the evening*: when it was dark. The bride was also closely veiled, so that it was easy for Laban to practise this piece of deceit. *A handmaid*. It was customary to give the bride a handmaid, who became her confidential servant (24:59, 61). 25-27: In the morning Jacob discovers that Laban has overreached him. This is the first retribution Jacob experiences for the deceitful practices of his former days. He expostulates with Laban, who pleads the custom of the country. It is still the custom not to give the younger in marriage before the older, unless the latter be deformed or in some way defective. It is also not unusual to practise the very same trick that Laban now employed, if the suitor is so simple as to be off his guard. Jacob, however, did not expect this at his relative's hands, though he had himself taken part in proceedings equally questionable. *Fulfil the week of this*. If this was the second day of the feast celebrating the nuptials of Leah, Laban requests him to complete the week,

and then he will give him Rachel also. If, however, Leah was fraudulently put upon him at the close of the week of feasting, then Laban in these words proposes to give Rachel to Jacob on fulfilling another week of nuptial rejoicing. The latter is in the present instance more likely. In either case the marriage of Rachel is only a week after that of Leah. 28-30: Rather than lose Rachel altogether, Jacob consents to comply with Laban's terms. Rachel was the wife of Jacob's affections and intentions. The taking of a second wife in the lifetime of the first was contrary to the law of nature, which designed one man for one woman (2:21-25). But the marrying of a sister-in-law was not yet incestuous, because no law had yet been made on the subject. Laban gives a handmaid to each of his daughters. To Rebekah his sister had been given more than one (24:61). Bondslaves had been in existence long before Laban's time (16:1). *And loved also Rachel more than Leah.* This proves that even Leah was not unloved. At the time of his marriage Jacob was eighty-four years of age; which corresponds to half that age according to the present average of human life" (Murphy, MG, 393).

Was this a case of what is known as *beena* marriage, that is, one in which the husband becomes a member of the wife's kin? Generally speaking, the narrative as a whole does not support the view that it was. Jacob did, of course, attach himself in a way to Laban's household; however, it does not follow that the former did not set up a house of his own. His remaining with Laban was due to his inability to pay the *bridal gift* otherwise than by *personal* service. As soon as the contract expired (by fulfilment) Jacob pleaded his right to "provide for his own house" (30:30). On the other hand, Laban certainly claimed the right to detain his daughters and to continue treating them as members of his own family (31:26, 43). It is doubtful, however, that "the claim was more than an extreme assertion of the right of a powerful family to

protect its female relatives even after marriage.” Concerning the dowry (Heb. *mohar*, *price* paid for a wife: Gen. 34:12, Exod. 22:17, 1 Sam. 18:25; *zebed*, a *gift*, Gen. 30:20): “In arranging for marriage, as soon as the parental consent was obtained, the suitor gave the bride a betrothal or bridal gift, as well as presents to her parents and brothers. In more ancient times the bride received a portion only in exceptional cases (Josh. 15:18 sq., 1 Kik 9:16). The opinion that the Israelites were required to buy their wives from the parents or relatives seems to be unfounded. The *mohar* in the Old Testament was not ‘purchase money,’ but the *bridal gift* which the bridegroom, after receiving the bride’s assent, gave to *her*, not to the parents or kinsfolk” (UBD, 274). “In early O.T. times wives were selected for sons by the heads of tribes or families, as Abraham for Isaac (Gen. 25:20), Isaac for Jacob (28:6). Betrothal was effected by the payment of the *mohar* (usually 50 shekels) to the father of the prospective bride, not as a purchase price, but as a compensation for the loss of the daughter (Gen. 34:12, 1 Sam. 18:25); by the presentation of substantial gifts to the girl (Gen. 34:12, Exo. 21:7, 22:15-17; Deut. 22:28ff.; Ruth 4:5, 10); or by the groom’s agreeing to serve the bride’s father for a period of time, as Jacob served Laban for Leah and Rachel (Gen. 29:18, 20, 25, 30). The bride often brought considerable means to the new home, e.g., Abigail (1 Sam. 25:42). The recently discovered Eshnunna Law Code current in Babylon probably 3800 years ago (the oldest law code yet known) required the payment of ‘bride money’ by the prospective groom, and a refund of the same plus 20% interest in case the bride died” (HBD, 421). It should be noted that the marriage of both sisters to Jacob took place about the same time; evidently such a connection was then permissible, although later prohibited (Lev. 18:18). We find in this narrative, not only bigamy, but polygamy, and polygamy on a larger scale than has hitherto appeared

in Genesis. These marriages, however, are not to be judged by the rules of the Christian, or even if the Mosaic, code of morality. "For although the will of the Creator was sufficiently indicated by the union of a single pair at first, a clear definite marriage law, specifying the prohibited degrees of consanguinity had not been enacted, and the idea of incest, therefore, must be excluded" (CECG, 203).

The Problem of Polygamy. According to Scripture, marriage is a divinely ordained institution, designed to form a permanent union between the male and female, *i.e.*, the conjugal union, which is the basis of all social order. (Gen. 1:27-28; Matt. 5:32, 19:9). The *physiological* sex union in marriage has a twofold function: *procreative*, to reproduce the species, and *unitive*, to enhance the intimacy of the conjugal union. Because the human infant is the most helpless, and the most helpless for the longest time, by comparison with animal offspring, it stands in greater need of parental protection, affection and training; hence the permanent monogamous relation that provides for the satisfaction of all these essential human needs, both of children and parents, is obviously the divinely ordained relationship, as the Bible clearly teaches. However, at an early period the original law as made known to our first parents was violated, and the familial institution corrupted, by the degeneracy of their descendants, and concubinage and polygamy became rather common (cf. Gen. 4:19-24). The patriarchs themselves took more than one wife. Abraham, at Sarah's prompting took her maid as his subordinate wife, and later a second wife, Keturah. Jacob was inveigled, through Laban's duplicity, to take Leah first, and then Rachel, to whom he had been betrothed, as wives; and later, through the rivalry of the two sisters, he took both of their handmaids and begat sons by them. "From these facts it has been inferred that polygamy was not wrong in ancient times, nor at all opposed to the divine law as revealed to the Jews. But this is an unwarranted

conclusion. It is true, indeed, respect being had to the state of religious knowledge, and the rude condition of society, and the views prevalent in the world, that the practice could not infer, in the case of individuals, the same amount of criminality as would necessarily adhere to it now, amid the clear light of Gospel times. But still all along it was a departure from the divine law. . . . Christ taught the divine origin and sacredness of this institution. It is more than filial duty; it is unifying; the husband and wife become one through the purity and intensity of mutual love; common interests are necessitated by common affection (Matt. 19:5-6, Eph. 5:31); only one single ground for divorce is lawful (Matt. 19:9)" (UBD, 697-701). That ground is, of course, unfaithfulness to the marriage vow (Matt. 5:32, 19:9). Departures from the original standard, even under the Old Testament, were tolerated, but never with God's complete approval (cf. Acts 17:30, Matt. 19:8). "The Mosaic law aimed at mitigating, rather than removing evils which were inseparable from the state of society in that day. Its enactments were directed: (1) to the discouragement of polygamy; (2) to obviate the injustice frequently consequent upon the exercise of the rights of a father or a master; (3) to bring divorce under some restriction; and (4) to enforce purity of life during the maintenance of the matrimonial bond" (UBG, 697). (For all aspects of the problems of the dowry, marriage, concubinage, divorce, etc., the reader is referred to Unger's *Bible Dictionary*, in the opinion of the present writer, one of the most comprehensive and reliable in its field.

V. 30—Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. There can be little doubt that this affection for Rachel was truly love at first sight, and love of the most ardent kind. However, it is not a matter of surprise to learn that Rachel should occupy a place in his affection far above that of her sister, who, after all, must have been a willing accomplice

in the treacherous plot to trap him into a marriage with her. Subsequent developments seem to establish the fact that Leah was more than willing to become Jacob's bride. As a matter of fact, her affection for him seems to have engendered a rivalry between the two sisters to be instrumental in providing for Jacob a numerous progeny. Jacob's love for Rachel, on the other hand, is rightly described as "more like what is read in the pages of romance than what is paralleled in real life."

Jacob Suffers Retributive Justice. "We have here an illustration of how a man must reap as he has sown. The deceit which Jacob practiced on Esau was returned to him by Laban, who practiced the same kind of deceit. For all of that, however, Jacob was under the covenant care of God and did not come out a loser in the end. Yet in later years Jacob's own sons practiced on him a similar form of deceit in connection with Joseph's abduction (37:32-36)" (HSB, 48). "V. 23—Leah being veiled, as ch. 24:65, and it being dark, Jacob could not discern the fraud. Thus he who beguiled his brother, and imposed on his dim-sighted father, was now, in like manner, beguiled himself. V. 25—By bitter experience Jacob was now taught how painful, how harrowing, to the feelings of others, was the cunning and duplicity which he himself had practised on his father and brother. From this moment to the day of his death he continued to be the victim of deception and falsehood. Retributive justice seems to have followed him until, in God's providence, it completely purified him" (SIBG, 262). Laban's deception in first palming off Leah on Jacob instead of giving him Rachel, whom he wanted to marry, was the first retribution Jacob experienced for the deceitful practises of his former days. He had, through fraud and cunning, secured the place and blessing of Esau—he, the younger, in the place of the elder; now, by the same deceit, the elder is put upon him in the place of the younger. What a man sows that shall he also reap.

Sin is often punished with sin" (Gosman, BCOTP, 529). (Retributive justice, in Greek thought, was personified by the name of Nemesis. That Nemesis finally overtakes and punishes inordinate human pride and ambition was the thesis of the histories of Herodotus, who is known as "the father of history." The same idea is explicit in Scripture: cf. Num. 32:23, Ezek. 21:27, Rom. 2:5-11, Prov. 12:14, Gal. 6:7, 1 Tim. 5:24, Rev. 20:11-15).

V. 30—Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban yet another seven years for her. "*A great stone* was over the well where the sheep were watered, and the men who were there were waiting for other shepherds to come and help them roll it aside; but Jacob went and rolled it aside himself. Why? Because he had met Rachel; and in contact with Rachel, Jacob from the first moment was a different man. He kissed her first as his kinsman, but quickly he fell in love with her. He said to Laban, her father, that he would serve seven years for her; *and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.* In the light of words like these, Jacob's remoteness in time and place passes like a shadow, and he is at one with all lovers of every age in the timeless wonder of the meeting of man and maid. Moreover, Jacob showed himself to be an individual to a degree that was notable in that period when family pressure was generally so controlling. His father, Isaac, had his bride picked out for him. Laban tried to foist upon Jacob the daughter he wanted Jacob to take; but in spite of that deception, Jacob would not be turned from the girl to whom his heart went out. He served for her not only the first seven years of his agreement, but seven years more; and Rachel was henceforth the center of his life's devotion. In the whole story of his career, which sometimes was far from beautiful, this relationship with Rachel shines like a shaft of sunlight, sifting with a lovely radiance through a broken, cloudy sky" (IBG, 697).

The nuptial feast generally lasted a week (Judg. 14:12, Job 11:19); after this week had passed, Jacob received Rachel also: that is, two wives in eight days. To each of his daughters Laban gave one maid-servant to wait upon her; fewer, it may be noted, than Bethuel gave to his daughter Rebekah (24:61). "The difference between the house at Haran and Isaac's house at Beersheba, appears from this, that Laban entangled Jacob in polygamy. And even in this case the evil consequences of polygamy appear: envy, jealousy, contention, and an increased sensuality. Nevertheless, Jacob's case is not to be judged according to the later Mosaic law, which prohibited the marrying of two sisters at the same time (Lev. 18:18). Calvin, in his decision, makes no distinction between the times and the economies, a fact which Keil justly appeals to, and insists upon, as bearing against his harsh judgment (that it was a case of incest)" (BCOTP, 533). "Isaac's prejudice, that Esau was the chosen one, seems to renew itself somewhat in Jacob's prejudice that he must gain by Rachel the lawful heir. The more reverent he appears therefore, in being led by the Spirit of God, who taught him, notwithstanding all his preference for Joseph, to recognize in Judah the real line of the promise" (*ibid.*, 533; cf. Gen. 49:10). "Jacob's service for Rachel presents us a picture of bridal love equaled only in the same development and its poetic beauty in the Song of Solomon. It is particularly to be noted that Jacob, however, was not indifferent to Rachel's infirmities (30:2), and even treated Leah with patience and indulgence, though having suffered from her the most mortifying deception" (*ibid.*, p. 532). "This bigamy of Jacob must not be judged directly by the Mosaic law, which prohibits marriage with two sisters at the same time (Lev. 18:18), or set down as incest, since there was no positive law on the point in existence then. At the same time, it is not to be justified on the ground, that the blessing of God made it the means of the fulfilment

of His promise, viz., the multiplication of the seed of Abraham into a great nation. Just as it had arisen from Laban's deception and Jacob's love, which regarded outward beauty alone, and therefore from sinful infirmities, so did it become in its results a true school of affliction to Jacob, in which God showed to him, by many a humiliation, that such conduct as his was quite unfitted to accomplish the divine counsels, and thus condemned the ungodliness of such a marriage, and prepared the way for the subsequent prohibition in the law" (BCOTP, 287).

Certainly it should be noted here, that it was a son born to Jacob by Leah who became the ancestor of Messiah. That son was Judah; hence Messiah is named the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5, cf. Gen. 49:9-10). "Leah's election is founded upon Jehovah's grace. Without any doubt, however, she was fitted to become the ancestress of the Messianic Line, not only by her apparent humility, but also by her innate powers of blessing, as well as by her quiet and true love for Jacob. The fulness of her life becomes apparent in the number and in the power of her children; and with these, therefore, a greater strength of the mere natural life predominates. Joseph, on the other hand, the favorite son of the wife loved with a bridal love, is distinguished from his brethren, as the separated (ch. 49) among them, as a child of a nobler spirit, whilst the import of his life is not as rich for the future as that of Judah. . . . The history of Jacob's and Leah's union sheds a softening light upon even the less happy marriages, which may reconcile us to them, for this unpleasant marriage was the cause of his becoming the father of a numerous posterity; for it, indeed, proceeded the Messianic Line; leaving out of view the fact that Leah's love and humility could not remain without a blessing upon Jacob. The fundamental condition of a normal marriage is doubtless bride love. We notice in our narrative, however, how wonderfully divine grace may change

misfortune, even in such instances, into real good. God is especially interested in marriage connections, because He is thus interested in the coming generations" (Lange, CDHCG, 533). The fact must not be overlooked, however, that, as we have stated heretofore several times, the manifestations of Divine grace are the products of the Divine foreknowledge of man's free choices; in this particular case, the foreknowledge of the blessing which Leah's humility and love would bring into Joseph's life and to his progeny, no small part of which was the foreknowledge of Judah's intercession with Joseph for the life of young Benjamin and the well-being of his aged father Jacob: one of the most touching incidents in the lives of the patriarchs (Gen. 44:18-34).

Jacob—Man of Many Wrestlings. "Jacob here appears clearly as the man of the wrestlings of faith and as the patriarch of hope. However prudent, it happens to him as to Oedipus in the Greek tragedy. Oedipus solved the riddle of the Sphinx, yet is blind, and remains blind in relation to the riddle of his own life. Laban cheated him, as his sons did afterward, and he is punished through the same transgression of which he himself was guilty. Jacob is to struggle for everything—for his birthright, his Rachel, his herds, the security of his life, the rest of his old age, and for his grave. But in these struggles he does not come off without many transgressions, from which, however, as God's elect, he is liberated by severe discipline. He, therefore, is stamped as a man of hope by the divine providence. As a fugitive he goes to Haran; as a fugitive he returns home. Seven years he hopes for Rachel; twenty years he hopes for a return home; to the very evening of his life he is hoping for the recovery of Joseph, his lost son in Sheol; even whilst he is dying upon Egyptian soil, he hopes for a grave in his native country. His Messianic hope, however, in its full development, rises above all these instances, as is evident in the three chief

stages in his life of faith: Bethel, Peniel, and the blessing of his sons upon his death-bed. His life differs from that of his father Isaac in this: that with Isaac the quickening experiences fall more in the earlier part of his life, but with Jacob they occur in the later half; and that Isaac's life passes on quietly, whilst storms and trials overshadow, in a great measure, the pilgrimage of Jacob. The Messianic suffering, in its typical features, is already seen more plainly in him than in Isaac and Abraham; but the glorious exaltation corresponds also to the deeper humiliation" (CDHCG, 532).

3. *Jacob's Family* (29:31—30:24).

Basic Facts: (1) Jacob became the father of twelve sons and one daughter. "The inferior value set on a daughter is displayed in the bare announcement of her birth." (2) The assignment of the names here by the respective mothers themselves is determined by the circumstances. (3) The entire history of the birth of these sons is reflected in their names. (Their names all reappear in Jacob's Blessing, ch. 49). (4) Most significant of all, in the birth of these twelve sons, we have the basis for the future development of the Old Covenant in the history of the twelve tribes, especially in their organization into the Hebrew theocracy at Sinai and occupancy of the Land of Promise. All this was, of course, prophetic of the strictly spiritual norms and institutions of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Hebrews, chs. 7, 8, 9, 10; John 1:17; 2 Cor., ch. 3; Col. 2:8-16; Gal. 3:15-29; 4:21-31; Eph. 2:11-22, etc.). "The account of the jealousy and contention between Leah and Rachel (Gen. 29:31, 30:1-2), and the subsequent sinfulness and jealousy of the sons of Jacob (Gen. 34:25, 30; 35:22; 37:8, 18; 49:5-6) show vividly the fruits of polygamy. For the one man, Adam, God made the one woman, Eve. And why only one? Because He sought a godly seed (Mal. 2:15). Broken and ungodly homes produce ungodly offspring" (OTH, 101).

Leah's first four sons, 29:31-35. Jacob's weakness showed itself even after his double marriage in the fact that he loved Rachel more than Leah ("hated," in Leah's case, meant less loved; not so much "hated" as "rejected" or "unloved"; ABG, 230). When Yahweh saw that Leah was thus less loved, He "opened her womb." "The birth of Leah's first four sons is specifically referred to Jehovah's grace; first, because Jehovah works above all human thoughts, and regards that which is despised and of little account (Leah was the despised one, the one loved less, comparatively the one hated, Deut. 21:15); secondly, because among her first four sons were found the natural first-born (Reuben), the legal first-born (Levi), and the Messianic first-born (Judah); even Simeon, like the others, is given by Jehovah in answer to prayer. Jacob's other sons are referred to Elohim, not only by Jacob and Rachel (30:2, 6, 8), but also by Leah (vv. 18, 20) and by the narrator himself (v. 17), for Jacob's sons in their totality sustain not only a theocratic but also a universal destination. *He opened her womb*, that is, God "made her fruitful in children, which should attach her husband to her. But theocratic husbands did not esteem their wives only according to their fruitfulness (cf. 1 Sam., ch. 1)." Leah named her firstborn *Reuben*, that is, *Behold, a son!* "Joyful surprise at Jehovah's compassion. From the inference she makes: *now, therefore, my husband will love me*, her deep, strong love for Jacob, becomes apparent, which had no doubt, also, induced her to consent to Laban's deception." *Simeon (he has heard)*, her second son, "receives his name from her faith in God as a prayer-answering God." *Levi (he will cling, joined, reconciler, etc.)*. "The names of the sons are an expression of her enduring powerful experience, as well as of her gradual resignation. After the birth of the first one, she hopes to win, through her son, Jacob's love in the strictest sense. After the birth of the second, she hoped to be put on a footing of equality

with Rachel, and to be delivered from her disregard. After the birth of the third one she hoped at least for a constant affection. At the birth of the fourth she looks entirely from herself to Jehovah," hence the name of the fourth, *Judah* (*I shall praise*, or just *praised*). (Quotes above are from Lange, CDHCG, 529, 530). "The eye of the Lord is upon the sufferer. It is remarkable that both the narrator and Leah employ the proper name of God, which makes the performance of promise a prominent feature of his character. This is appropriate in the mouth of Leah, who is the mother of the promised seed. *That Leah was hated*—less loved than Rachel. He therefore recompenses her for the want of her husband's affection by giving her children, while Rachel was barren. *Reuben*—behold a son. *The Lord hath looked on my affliction*. Leah had qualities of heart, if not of outward appearance, which commanded esteem. She had learned to acknowledge the Lord in all her ways. *Simeon*—answer. She had prayed to the Lord, and this was her answer. *Levi*—union, the reconciler. Her husband could not, according to the prevailing sentiments of those days, fail to be attached to the mother of three sons. *Judah*—praised. Well may she praise the Lord, for this is the ancestor of the promised seed. It is remarkable that the wife of priority, but not of preference, is the mother of the seed in whom all nations are to be blessed. Levi the *reconciler* is the father of the priestly tribe. Simeon is attached to Judah. Reuben retires into the background. "On the etymology of the proper names of this and of the next chapter it has been remarked: 'the popular etymologies attached to the names are here extremely forced and sometimes unintelligible' (Skinner). Such a statement is the result of the critic's confusion. He acts on the assumption that these etymologies are to be scholarly efforts based on a careful analysis of Hebrew roots according to the Hebrew lexicon. Whereas, in reality, these are not etymologies at all but expres-

sions wrought into the form of proper names, expressing the sentiments or the hopes associated with the birth of these sons. So someone or even the mother may have remarked at the birth of the first-born, 'Look, a son,' *Reu-bhen.*' What is there 'forced' or 'unintelligible' about such a name? The added explanation as to what further thoughts Leah associated with this name 'Reuben' do, indeed, not grow out of the words, 'look, a son,' but they lay bare the inmost thoughts of her heart. Leah knows God as 'Yahweh,' an index of fine spiritual understanding and faith, and ascribes to him her fertility. She sees that Yahweh delights in being compassionate toward them that have 'affliction,' and hers was a state of affliction; and she anticipates that her husband will love her more." As for the second son Simeon, "Yahweh heard (*shama*), so she calls him 'hearing.'" "So in Hebrew the idea becomes more readily apparent. Leah implies that she has asked for this child in prayer. Again she ascribes the son to the graciousness of 'Yahweh.' She must have been a woman of faith." With respect to the name Levi, "here the play on words centers upon the root *lawah* which in the passive signifies 'grow attached to.' How poor Leah must have thirsted for the love that was denied her! Leah now stands on pretty firm ground: any man would be grateful for three healthy sons: especially are men in the Orient minded thus." As for the fourth, *Judah* (Praised), "apparently her hopes are by this time realized: she is no longer disregarded or loved but little. But in a sense of true devoutness she lets all praise be given to Yahweh and here contents herself with pure praise" (Leupold, EG, 801-803).

Rachel's adopted sons, 30:1-8. A rather passionate scene, in which Rachel does not appear to advantage by any means. She even vented her spleen on Jacob: "*Give me children, or else I die.*" Certainly not, I will take my life; but rather, I die from humiliation or dejection.

Driven by jealousy of her sister, she yields her place to her maid, Bilhah. "Her vivid language sounds not only irrational, but even impious, and therefore she rouses also the anger of Jacob" (Lange). "Her petulant behavior recalls that of Sarah (16:5), but Jacob is less patient than Abraham, as he exclaims, in substance: *Why ask me to play God? You know that God alone controls the issues of life and death* (cf. Deut. 32:39, 1 Sam. 2:6). In Freudian terms, Rachel was "projecting" her own weakness upon her husband, a favorite avocation of humankind generally (cf. Gen. 3:12, 13). (Cf. Gen. 50:19, 2 Ki. 5:7). "Rachel becomes impatient of her barrenness and jealous of her sister, and unjustly reproaches her husband, who indignantly rebukes her. God, not he, has withheld children from her. She does what Sarah had done before her (16:2, 3), gives her handmaid to her husband. No express law yet forbade this course, though nature and Scripture by implication did (2:23-25)" (Murphy, MG, 397). Since Jacob had already sired offspring by Leah, Rachel could hardly have doubted his ability to do so by her, and must have recognized that the fault was with her. But she was unwilling to face the facts and tried to palm off the responsibility for the situation on Jacob. V. 3—that she, Bilhah, "*may bear upon my knees*, and I also may obtain children by her." (cf. 50:19, 23; 2 Ki. 5:7). "From the fact that children were *taken upon the knees*, they were recognized either as adopted children (50:23), or as the fruit of their own bodies (Job 3:12)" (Lange). "An illusion to the primitive ceremony of adoption, which here simply means that Bilhas's children will be acknowledged by Rachel as her own" (Skinner). "To place a child on one's knees is to acknowledge it as one's own; cf. the Hurro-Hittite tale of Appu. . . . This act is normally performed by the father. Here, however, it is of primary interest to the adoptive mother who is intent on establishing her legal right to the child" (Speiser, ABG, 230). The

ceremony may be traced to a widespread custom, according to which, "in lawful marriage, the child is actually brought forth on the father's knees. . . . Then it became a symbol of the legitimization of a natural child, and finally a form of adoption generally" (ICCG, 386). (Cf. Job 3:12; *Iliad* 9:455ff.; *Odyssey* 19, 401ff.; Gen. 50:23). In the case before us, "the putative mother names the adopted child." Rachel named Bilhah's first son *Dan* ("judge"; "*dananni*", "he has done justice to me"), i.e., God had procured justice for her, hearkened to her voice and removed the reproach of childlessness. Bilhah's second son: Rachel named him *Naphtali* ("wrestlings," "wrestlings of prayer she had wrestled with Leah"). "The wrestlings of God could only be in the wrestlings of prayer, as we afterward see from Jacob's wrestlings, through which he becomes Israel" (Lange, 530; cf. Gen. 32:24-25). "In reality, however, with God Himself, who seems to have restricted His mercy to Leah alone" (Delitzsch). "Leah, who had been forced upon Jacob against his inclination, and was put by him in the background, was not only proved by the four sons whom she had bore to him in the first years of their marriage, to be the wife provided for Jacob by Elohim, the ruler of human destiny; but by the fact that these four sons formed the real stem of the promised numerous seed, she was proved still more to be the wife selected by Jehovah, in realization of His promise, to be the tribe-mother of the greater part of the covenant nation. But this required that Leah herself should be fitted for it in heart and mind, that she should feel herself to be the handmaid of Jehovah, and give glory to the covenant God for the blessing of children, or see in her children actual proofs that Jehovah had accepted her and would bring to her the affection of her husband. It was different with Rachel, the favorite and therefore high-minded wife. Jacob should give her what God alone could give. The faithfulness and blessing of the covenant God were still

hidden from her. Hence she resorted to such earthly means as procuring children through her maid, and regarded the desired result as the answer of God, and a victory in her contest with her sister. For such a state of mind, the term *Elohim*, God the sovereign ruler, was the only fitting expression" (BCOTP, 288-289). "But how can Rachel speak of a victory over her sister rich in children? Leah has left bearing, while Bilhah her maid, begins to bear; at the same time, Rachel includes as much as possible in her words in order to overpersuade herself. [She believes she has overcome—Gosman]. Hence, still, at Joseph's birth, she could say: Now (not before) God has taken away my reproach" (Lange, CDHCG, 530; cf. 30:23-24).

Leah's adopted sons, 30:9-13. Leah, however, was not content with the blessing of four sons bestowed on her by Yahweh. The means employed by Rachel to retain the favor of her husband made her jealous, and this jealousy moved her to resort to the same device, viz., that of giving her handmaid Zilpah to Jacob for the begetting of adopted sons. Jacob begat two sons by Zilpah. Leah named the first one Gad (*good fortune*, or *good fortune has come*). She named the second *Asher* (the *happy one*, or the *bringer of happiness*). "Leah is still less excusable than Rachel, since she could oppose her own four sons to the two adopted sons of Rachel. However, the proud and challenging assertions of Rachel seem to have determined her to a renewed emulation; and Jacob thought that it was due to the equal rights of both to consent to the fourth marriage. That Leah now acts no longer as before, in a pious and humble disposition, the names which she calls her adopted sons clearly prove" (Lange, *ibid.*, 530) (It is worth noting that *Gad* was the name of an Aramean and Phoenician god of Luck (*Tyche*, cf. Isa. 65:11. It is possible also that the name *Asher* is historically related to

the Canaanite goddess Asherah, consort of El in Ras Shamra texts.)

Leah's last two sons, 30:14-20. We have here what might be called a primitive tradition. These occur in Scripture, simply as matters of fact, historically; even though they may savor of magic they serve to give us the background against which the careers of the patriarchs are portrayed. It must be understood that *the mere recording of magical theories and practices, and popular superstitions, of any period, as historical facts, does not mean that they are Biblically sanctioned.* According to the story of Gen. 30:14-16, Reuben, when a boy of some four or five years of age, brought to his mother a plant found in the fields, of the kind known as *Mandragora officinarum*. This is described as a narcotic, laxative perennial of the nightshade family, related to the potato and the tomato. Out of the small white-and green flowers of this plant, according to the Song of Solomon 7:13, there grows at the time of the wheat harvest, yellow, strong, but sweet-smelling apples, of the size of a nutmeg. These were thought to promote fruitfulness. "The fruit of the plant is still considered in the East to have aphrodisiac properties" (ABG, 231), hence the common designation, *love-apples*. Theophrastus (who took over the Lyceum after the death of Aristotle) tells us that love-potions were prepared from the plant's roots. It was held in such high esteem by the ancients that the goddess of love, in some areas, was known as Mandragoritis. Mandrakes are still used by Arabs as a means of promoting child-bearing. "As for mandrakes themselves something may be said. Reuben gathered them in wheat-harvest, and it is then that they are still found ripe and eatable on the lower ranges of Lebanon and Hermon, where I have most frequently seen them. The apple becomes of a very pale yellow color, partially soft, and of an insipid, *sickish* taste. They are said to produce dizziness; but I have seen people eat them without experiencing any

such effect. The Arabs, however, believe them to be exhilarating and stimulating, even to insanity, and hence the name *tuffah el jan*—‘apples of the jan’” (Thomson, LB, 577).

The incident of the mandrakes shows how thoroughly the two wives were “carried away by constant jealousy of the love and attachment of their husband.” When Rachel requested that Leah give her some of the mandrakes, the latter bitterly upbraided her with not being content to have withdrawn (alienated?) her husband from her, but now wanting to get possession of the mandrakes which her little son had brought in from the field. It would seem that peculiar, even paradoxical, emotions are involved in the actions of these two women. It should be remembered that Leah is said to have left off bearing, after the birth of Judah (29:35). Was she now fearful that Rachel might now, with the help of the mandrakes, excel her in prolificness? “It is obviously the design [of the narrator] to bring out into prominence the fact that Leah became pregnant again without mandrakes, and that they were of no avail to Rachel. . . . Moreover, it could not be the intention of Rachel to prepare from these mandrakes a so-called love-potion for Jacob, but only to attain fruitfulness by their effects upon herself. Just as now, for the same purpose perhaps, unfruitful women visit or are sent to certain watering-places. From this standpoint, truly, the assumed remedy of nature may appear as a premature, eager self-help” (Lange, *ibid.*, 530-531). It should be noted that Rachel asked only for *some* of the mandrakes: it seems that there was no thought in her mind of depriving Leah of all these potent means of fruitfulness, nor is there any evidence that she thought of her sister as having “left off bearing” (a statement of the author of the narrative). “Reuben, as little children will, presents the mandrakes to his mother. Rachel, present at the time, and much concerned as usual about her sterility, thinks

to resort to this traditional means of relieving the disability and asks for 'some of the mandrakes' (*min*, 'some of') of Reuben. She had hardly thought that this harmless request would provoke such an outbreak on her sister's part. For Leah bitterly upbraids her with not being content to have withdrawn her husband from her, but, she petulantly adds, Rachel even wants to get the mandrakes of her son Reuben. Apparently, her hope that her husband would love her after she had born several sons (29:32) had not been fully realized. Childless Rachel still had the major part of his affection. Quite unjustly Leah charges Rachel with alienation of affection where such affection had perhaps never really existed. Leah was still being treated with more or less tolerance. So Leah certainly begrudges her sister the mandrakes, lest they prove effective and so give her sister a still more decided advantage. . . . Rachel desires to preserve peace in the household, and so concedes to yield the husband to her sister for the night, in return for the mandrakes which she nevertheless purposes to eat. The frank narrative of the Scriptures on this point makes us blush with shame at the indelicate bargaining of the sisters—one of the fruits of a bigamous connection" (EG, 812). "A bitter and intense rivalry existed between Leah and Rachel, all the more from their close relationship as sisters; and although they occupied separate apartments with their respective families, as is the uniform custom where a plurality of wives obtains, and the husband and father spends a day with each in regular succession, this arrangement did not, it seems, allay the mutual jealousies of Laban's daughters. The evil lies in the system, which, being a violation of God's original ordinance, cannot yield happiness. Experience in polygamous countries has shown that those run great risk who marry two members of one family, or even two girls from the same town or village. The disadvantages of such unions are well understood" (Jamieson, CECG, 205). Matthew Henry suggests a some-

what different interpretation of sisterly motivation in the case before us, one which is certainly well worth considering: "Whatever these mandrakes were, Rachel could not see them in Leah's hands, where the child had placed them, but she must covet them. The learned Bishop Patrick very well suggests here that the true reason of this contest between Jacob's wives for his company, and their giving him their maids to be his wives, was the earnest desire they had to fulfil the promise made to Abraham that his seed should be as the stars of heaven in multitude. And he thinks it would have been below the dignity of the sacred history to take such particular notice of these things if there had not been some such great consideration in them" (CWB, 50). (However, certain objections to this view would be the following: (1) Rachel asked for only *some*—not all—of the mandrakes: this would seem to indicate she was seeking only to put an end to her own sterility; (2) implicit in this view is the assumption that the sisters were fully cognizant of the *details* of the Abrahamic Promises, but we find no sure evidence that this was the fact; (3) implicit in this view also is the failure to apprehend fully the stark *realism* of the Biblical narratives; the Bible is one book that pictures life as men and women live it, never turning aside from truth even to hide the faults of men of great faith. The Bible is pre-eminently the Book of Life. It makes us fully aware of human character and its weaknesses.)

Leah parted with the mandrakes on condition that Rachel would permit Jacob to sleep with her that night. "After relating how Leah conceived again, and Rachel continued barren in spite of the mandrakes, the writer justly observes (ver. 17), '*Elohim hearkened unto Leah*,' to show that it was not from such natural means as love-apples, but from God the Author of life, that she had received such fruitfulness" (BCOTP, 290). Leah then bore Jacob two more sons: (1) the first she named *Issachar*

("hire," "reward"), that is to say, "there is reward" or "he brings reward." (2) The second she named *Zebulun* ("dwelling"). The import of the first name is, either that she had hired her husband, or that she had received her hire—*i.e.*, a happy result—from God. The name of the second signified "she hoped that now, after God had endowed her with a good portion, her husband to whom she had borne six sons, would dwell with her, *i.e.*, become more warmly attached to her" (Delitzsch). "The birth of a son is hailed with demonstrations of joy, and the possession of several sons confers upon the mother an honor and respectability proportioned to their number. The husband attaches a similar importance to the possession, and it forms a bond of union which renders it impossible for him ever to forsake or to be cold to a wife who has borne him sons. This explains the happy anticipations Leah founded on the possession of her six sons" (Jamieson). It is to be noted that "in connection with these two births, Leah mentions Elohim only, the supernatural Giver, and not Yahweh, the covenant God, whose grace has been forced out of her heart by jealousy" (Delitzsch). It should be noted that the reference here to the "wheat harvest" (v. 14) has prompted the critics to affirm that *the agricultural background shows the episode here to be out of place in its nomadic setting*. But the text does not say that the nomads did the harvesting. Besides, no one would deny the possibility of their using the expression 'wheat harvest' to specify a definite season of the year even if they themselves did no harvesting. Moreover, this may be only the author's remark, used to specify the particular season when, as his readers would know, mandrakes usually ripened. In addition to all these considerations, there is the explicit information that the patriarchs on occasion sowed and reaped in their homeland (cf. 26:12) and perhaps their relatives did so in Mesopotamia. It is quite possible, too, that the lad

Reuben might have wandered into the fields where some of his farmer-neighbors were harvesting, and gathered his mandrakes there. We see no reason for accepting the critical view stated above as the only explanation of the milieu of this incident. (Cf. Exo. 9:32, Deut. 8:8, Judg. 6:11, Ruth 2:23; 1 Sam. 6:13, 12:17; 1 Chron. 21:20; 2 Chron. 2:10-15, 27:5; Ezra 6:9, 7:22; Matt. 13:25, 29; Luke 3:17; John 12:24).

Leah's daughter, v. 21. The name *Dinah*, about the same in meaning as Dan, could signify "Vindication." However, the etymology is not indicated in the text. Moreover, Dinah is not included in Gen. 32:22, where Jacob's household is said to have consisted of his two wives, his two handmaids, and his eleven children. Later Scriptures would seem to indicate that Dinah was not Jacob's only daughter (cf. Gen. 37:35, 46:7). It is likely that Dinah is specifically mentioned here in passing, as preparatory to the incident in her history—that of her defilement—related in ch. 34. The fact that Dinah is given only passing mention here is ample evidence of the subordinate place of the daughter in the patriarchal household.

Rachel's first son, 30:22-24. God *remembered* Rachel and *hearkened* to her (prayers) and *opened her womb*. The expression used here denotes a turning-point after a long trial (cf. 8:1) and in the matter of removing unfruitfulness (1 Sam. 1:19-20). God gave Rachel a son, whom she named *Joseph*, *one that takes away*, or *he may add*: "because his birth not only furnished an actual proof that God had *removed* the reproach of her childlessness, but also excited the wish, that Jehovah might *add* another son. The fulfilment of this wish is recorded in chap. 35:16ff. The double derivation of the name, and the exchange of *Elohim* for *Jehovah*, may be explained, without the hypothesis of a double source, on the simple ground, that Rachel first of all looked back at the past, and, think-

ing of the earthly means that had been applied in vain for the purpose of obtaining a child, regarded the son as a gift of God. At the same time, the good fortune which had now come to her banished from her heart her envy of her sister (ver. 1), and aroused belief in that God, who, as she had no doubt heard from her husband, had given Jacob such great promises; so that in giving the name, probably at the circumcision, she remembered Jehovah and prayed for another son from His covenant faithfulness" (BCOTP, 290). According to Lange, the text allows only one derivation: *he may add*: "to take away and to add are too strongly opposed to be traced back to one etymological source. Rachel, it is true, might have revealed the sentiments of her heart by the expression, God hath taken away my reproach; but she was not able to give to her own sons names that would have neutralized the significance and force of the names of her adopted sons, Dan and Naphthali. That she is indebted to God's kindness for Joseph, while at the same time she asks Jehovah for another son, and thereupon names Joseph, does not furnish any sufficient occasion for the admission of an addition to the sources of scripture, as Delitzsch assumes. The number of Jacob's sons, who began with Jehovah, was also closed by Jehovah. For, according to the number of twelve tribes, Israel is Jehovah's covenant people" (CDHCG, 531). The majority of Old Testament commentators seem to agree that the meaning of Joseph's name is more literally, "add"; that is to say, *May Yabweb add to me another son*. "At last Rachel bears a son, long hoped for and therefore marked out for a brilliant destiny" (ICCG, 389). "A double thought plays into the name Joseph: it incorporates both of Rachel's remarks. For *yoseph* may count as an imperfect of '*asaph*', 'to take away.' Or it may also count more definitely as imperfect (*Hifil*) of the verb *yasaph*, 'to add.' We must admit this to be very ingenious. But why deny to a

mother a happy ingenuity on the occasion of her greatest joy? Why try to inject the thought of a confusion of two sources?" (EG, 816). We are disposed to conclude this phase of our study with the pertinent and (one might well say) almost facetious remarks of Dr. Leupold in relation to Leah's action, v. 16: "Jacob's lot cannot have been a very happy one. To an extent he was shuttled back and forth between two wives and even their hand-maids. Almost a certain shamelessness has taken possession of Jacob's wives in their intense rivalry. Leah almost triumphantly claims him as a result of her bargain, as he comes in from the field" (EG, 813). We are glad to note that with the birth of Joseph, the "shuttling back and forth" on Jacob's part seems to come to an end and the dove of peace settles down over his household, as evidenced especially by the loyalty of both daughters to their husband in the continued contest with their father Laban (cf. 31:4-16).

4. *Negotiations With Laban* (30:25-43).

Jacob proposes to provide for his own household, 30:25-31. From the reading of the text it seems that Joseph must have been born at the end of the fourteen years of Jacob's service. However, it must be understood that apparently there is no attempt made here to report the births of Jacob's sons in strict sequence chronologically. Apparently the children born of one mother are listed in a group "in order to dispose of all of them at once, except in the case of Leah where approximately a year may have elapsed between the birth of her fourth and fifth sons." By this time Jacob's family was almost complete, and he might well be thinking of establishing his own household. When the birth of Joseph occurred, evidently at the earliest in the fifteenth year, Jacob enters into a preliminary parley with Laban for the purpose of taking his household back unto *his own place and his own country*, that is, to Canaan in general, and to that part of it where

he had formerly resided (28:10, 34:18, 35:6-7). Since Jacob had pledged himself to seven additional years of service for Rachel, he could hardly call his whole household his own until the second seven years were fulfilled. He now wants Laban to acknowledge the fulfilment of his contract by giving him his wives and children so that he may depart, pointing out the fact that his service throughout all these years had been marked by faithfulness (v. 26). "There is no obsequiousness about Jacob's attitude, no difference. -He knows his father-in-law must be dealt with firmly. On the other hand, he also knows how to treat him with becoming respect. Laban deferentially replies that he has "divined" that Jehovah was blessing Jacob's endeavors, and through His blessing of Jacob's service was indirectly blessing him, *i.e.*, Laban himself, with material prosperity. What is the import of the word "divined" as used here (v. 27)? Does it mean simply *close observation and minute inspection* (Murphy)? Or is there a reference here to augury, divination, or something of the kind? Leupold gives it, he had "consulted omens." "What heathen device Laban had resorted to in consulting the omens cannot be determined. But the act as such does reveal a departure from the true service of God and practically stamps him as an idolator. His reference to God as Yahweh is merely a case of accommodating himself to Jacob's mode of speech. Laban did not know Him as such or believe in Him. Any man with even a measure of insight could have determined without augury what Laban claimed had been revealed to him by augury. Jacob's faithful service of Yahweh was not kept hidden from him" (EG, 818). "In a Mesopotamian context, such as the present, the term refers undoubtedly to inquiries by means of omens: cf. Ezek. 21:26)" (Speiser, ABG, 236). We know that Laban was addicted to heathen superstitions (cf. 31:22-32).

Laban, an eminently selfish man, was ready to go to almost any limit to retain a man whose service had been so advantageous to himself. "He makes Jacob a proposition which at once substantially alter's Jacob's status. From the position of a bond servant he is raised to that of a partner who may freely dictate his own terms. Now, indeed such an offer is not to be despised, for it puts Jacob in a position where he can build up a small fortune of his own and removes him from the necessity of returning home practically a penniless adventurer, though a man with a good-sized family." (We present here the translation which is given us in the *Jerusalem Bible*, which, for simplicity and clarity is unexcelled, as follows: "When Rachel had given birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, 'Release me, and then I can go home to my own country. Give me my wives for whom I have worked for you, and my children, so that I can go. You know very well the work I have done for you.' Laban said to him, 'If I have won your friendship . . . I learned from the omens that Yahweh had blessed me on your account. So name your wages,' he added, 'and I will pay you.' He answered him, 'You know very well how hard I have worked for you, and how your stock has fared in my charge. The little you had before I came has increased enormously, and Yahweh has blessed you wherever I have been. But when am I to provide for my own House?' Laban said, 'How much am I to pay you?' and Jacob replied, 'You will not have to pay me anything; if you do for me as I propose, I will be your shepherd once more and look after your flock.'"

The new contract, 30:32-36. Continuing the JB rendering: "Today I will go through all your flock. Take out of it every black animal among the sheep, and every speckled or spotted one among the goats. Such shall be my wages, and my honesty will answer for me later: when you come to check my wages, every goat I have that is

not speckled or spotted, and every sheep that is not black shall rank as stolen property in my possession.' Laban replied, 'Good! Let it be as you say.' That same day he took out the striped and speckled he-goats and all the spotted and speckled she-goats, every one that had white on it, and all the black sheep. He handed them over to his sons, and put three days' journey between himself and Jacob. Jacob took care of the rest of Laban's flock."

Jacob's stratagem, 30:37-43. Jacob gathered branches in sap, from poplar, almond and plane trees, and peeled them in white strips, laying bare the white on the branches. He put the branches he had peeled in front of the animals, in the troughs in the channels where the animals came to drink; and the animals mated when they came to drink. They mated therefore in front of the branches and so produced striped, spotted and speckled young. As for the sheep, Jacob put them apart, and he turned the animals towards whatever was striped or black in Laban's flock. Thus he built up droves of his own which he did not put with Laban's flock. Moreover, whenever the sturdy animals mated, Jacob put the branches where the animals could see them, in the troughs, so that they would mate in front of the branches. But when the animals were feeble, he did not put them there; thus Laban got the feeble, and Jacob the sturdy, and he grew extremely rich, and became the owner of large flocks, with men and women slaves, camels and donkeys."

To understand Jacob's stratagem it must be understood that in the Orient sheep are normally white (Psa. 147:16; Song of Sol. 4:2, 6:6; Dan. 7:9), and goats are normally black or brownish black (Song 4:1). Exceptions to this differentiation, it is said, are not numerous. Jacob said at the beginning of the negotiations that Laban should not *give* him anything: in the proposition he is now making he is not changing his mind: he means simply that in subsequent breeding, separation of his animals from

those of his father-in-law shall be determined by the principles of "selective breeding" which he now proposes. "For his wages Jacob asks the abnormal animals (black sheep and white-spotted goats): Laban agrees, shrewdly, as he thinks. Jacob's plot is briefly this: 1. He sees to it that when the goats mate, vv. 37-39, they are in sight of white-striped rods: this affects the formation of the embryo. 2. At the same time he makes sure that the sheep are looking at the black goats in the flock, v. 40. 3. For this operation he selects the robust strains, leaving the weaker animals and their offspring to Laban. In this way Jacob takes his 'honorable revenge'" (JB, 51, n.).

Laban "not only recognizes, almost fawningly, Jacob's worth to his house, but is even willing to yield unconditionally to his determination—a proof that he did not expect of Jacob too great a demand. But Jacob is not inclined to trust himself to his generosity, and hence his cunningly calculated though seemingly trifling demand. Laban's consent to his demand, however, breathes in the very expression the joy of selfishness; and it is scarcely sufficient to translate: Behold, I would it might be according to thy word. But Jacob's proposition seems to point to a very trifling reward, since the sheep in the East are nearly all white, while the goats are generally of a dark color or speckled. For he only demands of Laban's herds those sheep that have dark spots or specks, or that are entirely black, and those only of the goats that are white-spotted or striped. But he does not only demand the speckled lambs brought forth thereafter, after the present number of such are set aside for Laban (Tuch, Baumgartner, Kurtz), but the present inspection is to form the first stock of his herds (Knobel, Delitzsch). ["The words, 'thou shalt not give me anything,' seem to indicate that Jacob had no stock from Laban to begin with, and did not intend to be dependent upon him for any part of his possessions. Those of this description which should

appear among the flocks should be his hire. He would depend on divine providence and his own skill. He would be no more indebted to Laban than Abraham was to the king of Sodom—Gosman]. Afterwards, also, the speckled ones brought forth among Laban's herds are to be added to his, as is evident from his following arts. For when he invites Laban to muster his herds in time to come, it surely does not mean literally the next day . . . but in time to come. As often as Laban came to Jacob's herds in the future he must regard all the increase in speckled and ringstreaked lambs as Jacob's property, but if he found a purely white sheep or an entirely black goat, then, and not only then, he might regard it as stolen. . . . Laban's language is submissive, while that of Jacob is very frank and bold, as became his invigorated courage and the sense of the injustice which he had suffered" (Lange, CDHCG, 536-537).

Jacob's management of Laban's herds. Note the *three days' journey between them*, v. 36. Certainly these days' journeys were those of the herds and are not to be measured according to journeys of human beings. Thus it will be seen that although separated by three days' journey of the animals, they were close enough that Laban could overtake Jacob at any time if he so desired. By means of this separation it would seem that Jacob not only gained Laban's confidence but his property as well. All in all, in this exchange of artifices it is difficult to determine which of the two—son-in-law or father-in-law—was the trickier, and more hypocritical, of the two. The *first artifice* that Jacob employed was that of the peeled rods in the watering troughs. "Jacob managed by skill to acquire the best portion of Laban's flock of sheep and goats. Black sheep, or goats other than black or brown, were rarities, and those Jacob was to have. According to the story he employed an ingenious breeding device to use maternal impression on the unborn of the flocks. He set

peeled rods in the watering-troughs, where the flocks came to breed, to impress the mothers of 'the stronger of the flocks.' Thus he managed to breed an ample supply of the new varieties" (Cornfeld, AtD, 86). Jacob, of course, must select rods from trees whose dark external bark produced the greatest contrast with the white one below it. The text suggests the fresh poplar (or styrax-tree), the almond-tree (or perhaps the hazelnut tree), and the plane tree (which resembled somewhat the maple tree). For the purpose Jacob had in mind, "the gum-tree," we are told, "might be betted adapted than white poplars, almond-tree or walnut better than hazelnut, and maple better than plane-tree"). Jacob "took fresh rods of storax, maple and walnut-trees, all of which have a dazzling white wood under their dark outside, and peeled stripes upon them, 'peeling the white naked in the rods.' These partially peeled, and therefore mottled rods, he placed in the drinking-troughs . . . to which the flock came to drink, in front of the animals, in order that, if copulation took place at the drinking time, it might occur near the mottled sticks, and the young be speckled and spotted in consequence. . . . This artifice was founded upon a fact frequently noticed, particularly in the case of sheep, that whatever fixes their attention in copulation is marked upon the young" (K-D, BCOTP, 293). Was this an old wives' superstition? Or had it some validity? "The physiological law involved is said to be well established (Driver), and was acted on by ancient cattle breeders (see the list of authorities in Bochart, *Hieroicoicon*, etc. II, c. 49, also Jeremias, *Das Alte Testament im Lichte des alten Orients*, 2nd ed. 1906). The full representation seems to be that the ewes saw the reflection of the rams in the water, blended with the image of the parti-colored rods, and were deceived into thinking they were coupled with parti-colored males (Jer., We [Ilhausen], *Die Composition des Hexateuchs*, 41)" (Skinner, ICCG, 393). "This artifice was

founded upon a fact frequently noticed, particularly in the case of sheep, that whatever fixes their attention in copulation is marked upon the young" (K-D, *ibid.*, 293). "This crafty trick was based upon the common experience of the so-called fright of animals, especially of sheep, namely, that the representations of the senses during coition are stamped upon the form of the foetus (see Boch, *Hieroz*, I, 618, and Friedreich on the Bible, I 37, etc.*)" (Lange *ibid.*, 537). Jacob's *second artifice* was the removal of the speckled animals, from time to time, from Laban's herds and their incorporation into Jacob's; in the exchange Jacob put the speckled animals in front of the others, so that Laban's herds had always these parti-colored before their eyes, and in this manner another impression was produced upon the she-goats and sheep. Obviously, this separation of the new-born lambs and goats from the old herds could only be gradual; indeed this whole transaction was gradual, extending over several years (cf. 38:41). Jacob's *third artifice*. "He so arranged the thing that the stronger cattle fell to him, the feebler to Laban. His first artifice, therefore, produced fully the desired effect. It was owing partly, perhaps, to his sense of equity toward Laban, and partly to his prudence, that he set limits to his gain; but he still, however, takes the advantage, since he seeks to gain the stronger cattle for himself" (Lange *ibid.*, 537).

Vv. 40-42. "A further refinement: Jacob employed his device only in the case of the sturdy animals, letting the weaker ones gender freely. The difference corresponds to a difference of breeding-time. The consequence is that Jacob's stock is hardy and Laban's delicate" (ICCG, 393).

The following summarization is clear: "V. 40—Jacob separated the speckled animals from those of a normal color, and caused the latter to feed so that the others would be constantly in sight, in order that he might in this way obtain a constant accession of mottled sheep. As soon as

these had multiplied sufficiently, he formed separate flocks (viz., of the speckled additions) and *put them not unto Laban's cattle*, i.e., he kept them apart in order that a still larger number of speckled ones might be produced, through Laban's one-colored flock having this mottled group constantly in view. Vv. 41, 42—He did not adopt the trick with the rods, however, on every occasion of copulation, for the sheep in those countries lamb twice a year, but only at the copulation of the strong sheep . . . but not 'in the weakening of the sheep,' i.e., when they were weak, and would produce weak lambs. The meaning is probably this: he adopted this plan only at the summer copulation, not the autumn, for, in the opinion of the ancients (*Pliny, Columella*), lambs that were conceived in the spring and born in the autumn were stronger than those born in the spring (*Bichart*, p. 582). Jacob did this, possibly, less to spare Laban, than to avoid exciting suspicion, and so leading to the discovery of his trick" (BCOTP, 294).

Murphy explains as follows: "Jacob devises means to provide himself with a flock in these unfavorable circumstances. Vv. 37-40: His first device is to place partly-colored rods before the eyes of the animals at the rutting season; that they might drop lambs and kids varied with speckles, patches, or streaks of white. He had learned from experience that there is a congruence between the colors of the objects contemplated by the dams at that season and those of their young. At all events they bare many straked, speckled, and spotted lambs and kids. He now separated the lambs, and set the faces of the flock toward the young of the rare colors, doubtless to affect them in the same way as the peeled rods. *Put his own folds by themselves*. These are the party-colored animals that from time to time appeared in the flock of Laban. Vv. 41, 42: In order to secure the stronger cattle, Jacob added the second device of employing the party-colored rods only when the strong cattle conceived. The sheep in the

East lamb twice a year, and it is supposed that the lambs dropped in autumn are stronger than those dropped in the spring. On this supposition Jacob used his artifice in the spring, and not in the autumn. It is probable, however, that he made his experiments on the healthy and vigorous cattle, without reference to the season of the year. V. 43—the result is here stated. *The man brake forth exceedingly*—became rapidly rich in lands and cattle” (MG, 399-400). (The reader probably will need to go to the dictionary for the meaning of the word “cattle,” as this word is used in the foregoing paragraph).

The original proposal made by Jacob, and Laban’s quick acceptance, must be recalled here. *Thou shalt not give me anything*, v. 31. This certainly shows that Jacob had no live stock from Laban at the outset. *I will pass through all thy flock today (with thee, of course). Remove every speckled and spotted sheep, and every brown sheep among the lambs, and the spotted and speckled among the goats. And such shall be my hire.* That is, not those of this description that are now removed, but the uncommon parti-colored animals when they shall appear among the flock already cleared of them. These were the animals of the rare coloring. Not those of this description that are now removed, for in this case Laban would have given Jacob something; whereas Jacob evidently was resolved to be entirely dependent on Divine providence for his hire. Note especially his statement: *My righteousness shall answer for me*, v. 33, that is, at the time of inspection and accounting to Laban. The color will determine at once to whom the animal belongs. (In view of the complex artifice that Jacob had in mind, was this really righteousness, or was it a kind of self-righteousness? Was Jacob thinking that the means would justify the end, in this instance? If so, was he assuming that Providence would support such a rule of action? At any rate, Laban consented willingly to this proposal. Why?

Because, obviously, he thought his son-in-law's proposal was rather naive, to say the least: from his point of view, it was a course of action that would play right into his own hands, for the simple reason that parti-colored cattle were uncommon. Jacob is now to begin with nothing, and to have for his hire any parti-colored lambs or kids that would appear in the flocks from which every specimen of this rare class had been carefully removed. Laban simply could not lose in this kind of deal! So Laban thought. But Laban was not aware of Jacob's cleverness! In this contest of wits, it is difficult to determine which of the two was the greater *con* man!

Dr. Cuthbert A. Simpson evaluates this Jacob-versus-Laban (or vice versa) series of transactions bluntly, yet withal so realistically, that his analysis is certainly in order here, as follows: When Jacob proposed to set up an establishment (household) for himself, "Laban, unwilling to lose his services, offered to allow him to fix his own wages. Jacob replied that he wanted nothing at the moment, but proposed that Laban should remove from his flocks all the speckled and spotted animals. These were to be set apart by themselves (cf. v. 36). Jacob would then care for the rest of the flock and would receive as his wages any speckled and spotted that might be born to these normally colored animals in the future. To this Laban promptly agreed (vss. 34-36)—indeed, why should he not accept a proposal so favorable to himself? If Jacob was such a fool to suggest it, let him take the consequences! But Jacob, though he may have been a knave, was no fool. He placed rods upon which he had peeled white streaks before the eyes of the stronger animals in the flocks at rutting time, with the result that the young born to them were *striped, speckled, and spotted*, and so belonged to him (vss. 37-39, 42a). Thus his substance increased rapidly (v. 43), and Laban was left with the feebler animals (vs. 42b). This story of one knave out-

witting another—doubtless another piece of shepherd lore—is of a piece with that in 25:27-34 (cf. also 26:1-11, 27:1-40), and it was told by J-1 with unfeigned delight; clever Jacob had outwitted the dull nomad Aramaean” (IBG, 708). With this analysis in general we are inclined to agree. However, the fact must not be overlooked that these sections cited had very definite connection, both morally and spiritually, with the history of the Messianic Line. (Moreover, the deceptions practised on Jacob were moral and spiritual—impositions on his familial relationships—whereas those perpetrated on Laban were of a material and hence secondary character.)

The “conclusion of the whole matter” is precisely as Jacob had planned: “the man increased exceedingly, and had large flocks, and maid-servants and men-servants, and camels and asses” (v. 43). This progress materially was evidently a matter of years, not just days: (cf. 31:41). The account simply closes with this remark, *i.e.*, concerning Jacob’s wealth, without intimating approbation of his conduct or describing his increasing wealth as a blessing from God. “The verdict is contained in what follows.”

5. *Jacob’s Preparation for Flight* (31:1-16).

The complete success that Jacob achieved excited the envy and jealousy of Laban’s sons, who were evidently old enough to be entrusted with the care of their father’s flocks (cf. 30:35), whose conduct as described here shows that the selfish disposition peculiar to this family was as fully developed in them as in Laban himself. It must have been from rumor that Jacob obtained knowledge of the invidious reflections cast on him by these cousins (31:1), as evident from the fact that they were separated from him at a distance of three days’ journey (a journey measured obviously by the movement of the animals involved). Jacob had also sensed a growing change in Laban’s feelings toward him (v. 2). Inwardly he was

prepared for the termination of all his connections with his father-in-law; at the same time he received instructions from Yahweh in a dream to return to his homeland with an accompanying promise of Divine protection (vv. 10-13). (No matter to what extent we may be disposed to inveigh against Jacob's trickery, we must never lose sight of the fact that Laban had deceived and exploited him for fourteen years or more. And we must realize also that God is often compelled to achieve his purposes through very weak and selfish human vessels. Such was undoubtedly the case here.) V. 2—*the countenance of Laban was not toward him as before: lit.*, was not the same as yesterday and the day before: a common Oriental form of speech. "The insinuations against Jacob's fidelity by Laban's sons, and the sullen reserve, the churlish conduct, of Laban himself, had made Jacob's situation, in his uncle's establishment, most trying and painful. It is always one of the vexations attendant to worldly prosperity, that it excites the envy of others (Eccl. 4:4); and that, however careful a man is to maintain a good conscience, he cannot always reckon on maintaining a good name in a censorious world. This Jacob experienced; and it is probable that, like a good man, he had asked direction and relief in prayer. Notwithstanding the ill usage he had received, Jacob might not have deemed himself at liberty to quit his present sphere under the impulse of passionate fretfulness and discontent. Having been conducted to Haran by God (cf. 28:15), and having got a promise that the same heavenly Guardian would bring him again into the land of Canaan—he might have thought he ought not to leave it, without being clearly persuaded as to the path of duty. So ought we to set the Lord before us, and to acknowledge him in all our ways, our journeys, our settlements and plans in life. Jacob did receive an answer, which decided his entrance upon the homeward journey to Canaan, with a re-assurance of the Divine presence and

protection by the way. But he himself alone was responsible for making his departure a hurried and clandestine flight" (CECG, 208). So Jacob called Rachel and Leah to him, evidently to the field where he was watching his flocks, in order to communicate to them his intentions and the reasons for them. Note that Rachel and Leah only were called; the other two women were still in a state of servitude and hence not entitled to be taken into account. "Having stated his strong grounds of dissatisfaction with their father's conduct, and the ill requital he had gotten for all his faithful services, he informed them of the blessing of God, that had made him rich notwithstanding Laban's design to ruin him; and, finally, of the command from God he had received to return to his own country, that they might not accuse him of caprice, or disaffection to their family, but be convinced that, in resolving to depart, he acted from a principle of religious obedience" (CECG, 209).

Note the sequence of names here: Jacob sent and called *Rachel and Leah*: "Rachel first, because she was the principal stay of his household, it having been for her sake that he entered into relations with Laban. Leah's descendants admitted Rachel's precedence inasmuch as Boaz, a member of the tribe of Judah, Leah's son, and his kinsmen said, *The LORD make the woman . . . like Rachel and like Leah*, Ruth 4:11" (Rashi, SC, 179).

Note also Jacob's charge, that Laban had deceived him and *had changed his wages ten times*, i.e., many times; ten, besides signifying a definite number, frequently stands in Scripture for *many* (cf. Lev. 26:26, 1 Sam. 1:8, Eccl. 7:9, Dan. 1:26, Amos 6:9, Zech. 8:23). Note that the *Angel of God* who spoke to Jacob in a dream was the Divine Being who identified Himself as the God of Bethel (v. 13; cf. 32:24-32, 35:9-15, 48:15-16). That is to say, he was not one of the angels who were seen ascending and descending on the symbolic ladder of Jacob's dream-vision

at Bethel (28:12-15): He identified Himself with God. (See art., "Angel of Jehovah," in my *Genesis* textbook, Vol. III, pp. 216-220, 496-500). Vv. 11-13, "The Angel of God specially draws Jacob's attention to what he sees. Jacob is not to regard the thing seen as trivial but as indicative of the fact that God 'had taken note of all that Laban had done' to him and was, of course, Himself taking measures to safeguard Jacob in what seemed like an unequal contest. Very definitely God identifies Himself to Jacob as the one who formerly had appeared at Bethel and to whom Jacob had appointed a pillar and vowed a vow. This is another way of saying that what He had then promised to do for Jacob is now actually being done. For assuredly, but for divine interference Jacob would have suffered irreparable loss" (EG, 835).

It should be noted that the two wives were of one mind and were in complete agreement with their husband (vv. 14-16). In fact, they say, their father has treated them as if they were "foreigners," and not of his own flesh and blood. Proof of this, said they, was in the fact that he had, to all intents and purposes *sold* them as servants would be sold: seven (or fourteen) years of service had been the price paid. Besides, whereas a less greedy father would have used the gift from his prospective son-in-law to provide a dowry for his daughters, Laban had entirely used it up, most likely by investing it directly in flocks and herds until it was completely absorbed. Now therefore, said they, *whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do* (v. 16). "From one point of view the wives are correct when they assert that all the present wealth of their father belongs to them and to their children, because he apparently had been wealthy before Jacob came, who by his assiduous and skillful management increased his father-in-law's 'riches' enormously. By all canons of right Jacob's family ought to have been adjudged as deserving of a good share of these riches. But the wives saw that their

father was not minded to give them or their husband anything at all. Apparently, the long pent-up grievances find expression in these words. Ultimately, then, the wives arrive at the conclusion that the best thing Jacob can do is to obey God's command and depart. Their mode of arriving at this conclusion is not the most desirable: they finally conclude to consent to what God commands because their best material interests are not being served by the present arrangement. Jacob, no doubt, approached the problem on a higher plane: he was obeying the God of his fathers, who had made promises to Jacob previously and was now fulfilling these promises. So in Jacob's case we have fidelity to God; in the case of his wives a greater measure of interest in material advantage. For that reason, too, Jacob's wives refer to Him only as *Elohim*" (EG, 836).

Vv. 17-21. So the father "rose up" and set the members of his family on camels, and with all his cattle and his substance which he had accumulated, and while Laban was engaged in shearing sheep, he "stole away un-awares to Laban the Syrian." That is to say, he fled posthaste. *He took about the only course he could to liberate himself from the clutches of his father-in-law.*

The following summarizations of Jacob's experiences in Paddan-Aram are excellent: "After the birth of Joseph, Jacob wished to become his own master; but Laban prevailed on him to serve him still, for a part of the produce of his flocks, to be distinguished by certain marks. *Jacob's artifice to make the most of his bargain may be regarded as another example of the defective morality of those times; but, as far as Laban was concerned, it was a fair retribution for his attempt to secure a contrary result.* Jacob was now commanded in a vision by 'the God of Bethel' to return to the land of his birth; and he fled secretly from Laban, who had not concealed his envy, to go back to his father Isaac, after twenty years spent in Laban's service—

fourteen for his wives, and six for his cattle. Jacob, having passed the Euphrates, struck across the desert by the great fountain at Palmyra; then traversed the eastern part of the plain of Damascus and the plateau of Bashan, and entered Gilead, which is the range of mountains east of Jordan, forming the frontier between Palestine and the Syrian desert" (OTH, 102. *Italics mine—C.C.*).

"In those days, getting the better of the other man was a sign of cleverness, and the Nuzi contracts also reflect this attitude. Jacob came under Laban's jurisdiction, and on condition that he would work for Laban a further seven years, he could finally marry his beloved Rachel. Then he agreed to work another seven years to acquire flocks of his own. He managed by skill to acquire the best portion of Laban's flock of sheep and goats. Black sheep, or goats other than black or brown, were rarities; and those Jacob was to have. According to the story he employed an ingenious breeding device to use maternal impression on the unborn of the flocks. He set peeled rods in the watering-troughs, where flocks came to breed, to impress the mothers of the 'stronger of the flocks.' Thus he managed to breed an ample supply of the new varieties. . . . Jacob came besides into possession of great wealth: two wives, two handmaids brought in by his wives as marriage gifts, in accordance with Mesopotamian custom (they were also his concubines who gave him children), and a large retinue of servants and followers, and also children, of whom he had eleven. But after twenty years of hard work Jacob's hopes were dashed. Laban had had sons born to him after their contract had been made: sons who, according to local usage, would become Laban's chief heirs rather than the adopted son. They were younger men who resented the position he had attained. The whole picture presented is of crafty tribesmen, each partly in the right, seeking loopholes in the laws. And Laban insisted on one item in the original

contract: that Jacob would not be permitted to take another wife in addition to the two daughters of Laban. The narrator of the story makes it clear that Jacob could only extricate himself from Laban's control by flight in the spring; and the two wives sided with their husband, agreeing that home was no longer the place for them" (Cornfeld, AtD, 86).

FOR MEDITATION AND SERMONIZING

Reflections

"Sinful marriages have sad consequences. Wives chosen for their beauty often bring a troublesome temper along with them. Envious discontentment and disappointed pride make multitudes miserable! Immoderate desire of children, or other created enjoyments, hurry many into fearful disorders! But it is vain ever to expect that happiness from creatures which can be had only in and from God himself. No love to persons should hinder our detestation and reproof of their sins. Even the godly are apt to fall into snares laid for them by their near relatives. And bad examples are more readily imitated than good ones. If we are once overcome by sin, we are apt to yield to it more easily afterward. Many are more governed by the estimation of the world than by reason or religion. It is very wicked for parents to transmit their quarrels to their children. It is no lessening of our guilt that God brings good out of our evil. People often promise themselves happiness in that which will be their death or ruin. Saints have need to trust their God, as all others may deceive them; and reason to desire their heavenly home, as this world is not their rest. What an advantage to families are servants remarkably pious! How criminal for covetous masters to defraud them of their wages! What good words worldly men can give to serve their own ends, and how wise they are for their own carnal interests! But their

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caution is vain when God designs to frustrate their purposes; and they often outwit themselves who intend to impose upon others. All agreements ought to be made with great clearness and accuracy, that no stain be thereby occasioned to our character; and in the use of lawful means to promote our wealth, our trust should be fixed on the promised providence of God. His blessing can quickly increase a little, and make it a great store." Again, on ch. 31, v. 13: "This is a simple statement, but there is most cheering truth embodied in it. He had vowed prospectively to dedicate a tenth of his property to the Lord, and thus in the ordinary affairs of life to testify to his complete dependence on the divine will. Now after a long and hard struggle, when wealth was acquired, and by the envy of an unjust master was placed in peril, the Lord graciously reminds him of the vision at Bethel" (SIBG, 263, 264).

Jacob's Vision of the Eternal

Gen. 28:11-22; John 14:1-9

Jacob was now fleeing from the face of Esau, and was on his way to Paddan-Aram. The first day he journeyed about forty-eight miles, and arrived at a place originally called Luz, but which, on account of the vision he had there, he afterwards called Beth-el. There never was a scene more truly solemn and interesting, than that with which the patriarch was favored on this memorable occasion. It was designed for his instruction and support; and the devout Christian, in reviewing it in the spirit of devout contemplation, cannot fail to receive both information and comfort from it. Let us, then, notice,

1. *What Jacob saw on this Occasion.* Overcome with the fatigue of the journey, he had selected a spot of ground for his couch, a stone for his pillow, and the outstretched canopy of heaven for his only covering. Wearied nature

JACOB: IN PADDAN-ARAM

was recruiting her energies by balmy sleep, when God was pleased to manifest himself to his servant, through the medium of a striking vision or dream.

(1) The object presented to his notice was a ladder. (2) Its position—between heaven and earth, filling the whole of the vast space between the two. (3) Its base—rested on the earth, close to the spot where he lay. (4) The top of it—reached to heaven, the place of Deity. (5) Above it—watching it, and viewing it with complacency and delight, stood the Lord, Jehovah of Hosts. (6) Upon it—were angels, the spiritual host of God, and they were ascending and descending as messengers, bearing tidings from heaven to earth, from God to man.

The appearance of the ladder might be intended to illustrate,

(1) The doctrine of divine providence. Both heaven and earth are under the divine government. Both worlds connected. God's eye constantly directed to the concerns of men. Angels minister to the necessities of the saints. This was eminently calculated to console the mind of Jacob in his present circumstances.

It might be intended to prefigure,

(2) The mediatorial work of Christ. Jesus is, emphatically, the sinner's ladder or way to heaven. None can come to God but by him. He has reconciled heaven to earth. The father looks upon men, through the work of his Son, with pleasure and delight. Angels, too, are now incorporated with believers, form a distinguished branch of this one family, and are all ministering spirits to those who shall be heirs of salvation: John 14:6, Heb. 1:14. Notice,

2. *What Jacob heard.* "And the Lord said, I am the Lord God of Abraham, etc." Here Deity, (1) Proclaimed himself the God of his fathers. "God of Abraham and Isaac," etc. He who made them a separate people, distinguished them, blessed them, etc. Him whom they had

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worshiped, trusted, etc. (2) He promised him the possession of the country where he then was. "The land whereon thou liest," etc., v. 15. (3) He promised him a numerous progeny, and that of him should come the illustrious Messiah, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. (4) He promised him his divine presence and protection. "I am with thee, and will keep thee," etc. This promise extended to all times and to all places, and to the end of life. "I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken," etc., v. 15. How condescending and gracious on the part of Deity! What comfort for Jacob! Yet how infinitely short of those rich promises given to believers in the gospel. Notice,

3. *What Jacob felt.* "And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place," v. 16. (1) He felt the influence of the Divine Presence. "The Lord is in this place." (2) He felt a sacred and solemn fear. "And he was afraid and said, How dreadful is this place!" Where God is, how solemn! Angels prostrate themselves before him, etc. (*Religious Dread.* When Jacob woke from his vision and felt that he had stood at the gate of heaven, there was first the sense of wonder and thanksgiving at the revelation of God's mercy; but then there swept over him an overwhelming awe. *How dreadful is this place!* he cried. When a man is made to know that God has not forgotten him, even though he has been a moral failure, there is the moment of rapturous exaltation such as Jacob had when he saw the shining ladder and the angels; but when he remembers the holiness of God, he turns his face away from its intolerable light. The vision must be more than the immediate emotion: it calls him to account. Who can contemplate the distance between him and God, even when the angels of God's forgiveness throw a bridge across it, and not bow down in agonized unworthiness? So it was with Jacob. The consciousness of guilt in him made him

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shrink from the revelation of God even when he craved it. He had done wrong, and he was trying to escape its consequences. His brother's anger was formidable enough; but there was something more formidable which he wanted to forget but which confronted him. His conscience was shocked into the certainty that he could not get away from God. The dread of that perception was on him now. Before he could ever be at peace with himself and with his world, he would have to come to grips with the facts of his past experience—and with the invisible power of the righteousness he had violated—and wrestle with them for his life, as he would one day at Peniel. It was well for Jacob that his awareness of God did not end with the vision of the ladder, but went on to realize the purification through which he must go before he could take the blessings which the angels of the ladder might bring to him. For Jacob, and for all men, there can be no flippant self-assurance. In relation to their sins the inexorable love of God must first seem dreadful before it can be redeeming" [IBG, 691, 692].) (3) He felt himself on the precincts of the heavenly world. "This is none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven." Where God reveals his glory, is heaven. He might well exclaim thus; for here he was surrounded with heavenly intelligences—had a vision of Jehovah, etc. Notice,

4. *What Jacob did.* (1) He expressed his solemn sense of the Divine Presence, vv. 16, 17. (2) He erected and consecrated a memorial of the events of that eventful night. Took the stone—made a pillow—poured oil upon it—called the place Beth-el. How pious! God had honored him, and he now desired to erect a monument to His glory. How necessary to keep up in his mind a remembrance of God's gracious manifestation! How proper to give God a public profession of our love, and fear, and obedience! (3) He vowed obedience to the Lord. Seeing that God had thus engaged to bless and keep him, he now

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resolved, and publicly avowed his resolution to love God, and to serve him with all his life and substance, v. 22. (4) He went on his way in peace and safety. How could he fail to proceed in peace and safety, when the Omniscient God guided, and the Almighty God protected him! Yet, this privilege have all his saints.

Application. Learn, 1. The privileges of piety. Divine manifestations, promises, etc. "In all thy ways acknowledge him," etc. 2. The duties of piety. God distinguishes his people, that they may be brought to holy obedience, and conformity to himself. "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God," etc., Rom. 12:1. 3. The delights of public worship. God's house is indeed the gate of heaven, the way to heaven is through his house. 4. How glorious a place is heaven, where the pure in heart shall see God and dwell in his presence forever! (The foregoing is taken verbatim [with the bracketed exception] from the volume, *Five Hundred Sketches and Skeletons of Sermons*, Appleton Edition, New York and London, 1913).

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON PART FORTY-ONE

1. Where was Paddan-aram? Why did Jacob go there? Whom would he find there?
2. How had this area figured in patriarchal history prior to that time?
3. What was the first scene which Jacob encountered on arriving there?
4. Summarize Thomson's description of Mesopotamian wells, cisterns, and stone coverings.
5. What conversation took place between Jacob and the shepherds?
6. Explain the phrase, "Rachel the Shepherdess" as indicated in ch. 29:9.
7. What was Jacob's reaction on seeing Rachel the first time?

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8. How was Jacob related to Rachel? Who was her father? Her sister?
9. In what rather unusual ways did Jacob react on seeing Rachel the first time?
10. Explain how the story of Jacob and Rachel parallels that of Eliezer, Rebekah and Isaac. In what respects do they differ? Why are they frequently referred to as "idylls"?
11. How is Jacob's weeping at his meeting Rachel the first time to be explained?
12. What are some of the rabbinical explanations of his show of emotion?
13. State the circumstances of Jacob's meeting with Laban. Where have we met Laban before?
14. Explain what is meant by Leah's "weak" eyes.
15. What was the first deception which Laban perpetrated on Jacob? What circumstance made it easy for him to do this?
16. How did Laban try to "rationalize" this deception?
17. To what additional service did Jacob commit himself in order to get Rachel as his wife? Is this service to be regarded as a kind of "dowry" to offset his coming to Laban without material gifts of any kind?
18. In what respects did Laban reveal himself as a "selfish schemer"?
19. What was the prevailing custom with respect to the giving of the younger daughter in marriage before giving the older?
20. What service did Jacob accept to obtain Rachel in marriage?
21. Are we right in saying that Jacob remained with Laban all these years as a result of his inability to pay the *bridal gift* otherwise than by personal service?
22. What is the full significance of the statement that the seven years of service for Rachel "seemed unto Jacob but a few days, for the love that he had to her"?

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23. Explain how Laban by his sharp practices inveigled Jacob into bigamy directly and indirectly into polygamy.
24. What was the *mohar* in the patriarchal culture?
25. Explain how bigamy and polygamy violate the will of God with respect to the conjugal union. Relate Acts 17:30 to these Old Testament practices.
26. Explain the circumstances of Jacob's double wedding.
27. Was the bigamous relationship here a case of incest? Explain your answer?
28. When was such a relationship as that which Jacob had with the two sisters prohibited by the Mosaic Law? In what Scripture is this prohibition found?
29. Explain why we say that in these various incidents Jacob was suffering what is called Retributive Justice? What name did the Greeks give to the personification of Retributive Justice?
30. Which of Jacob's sons became the ancestor of Messiah? What was his name? Who was his mother?
31. Why do we call Jacob a "man of many wrestlings"?
32. What do we learn about Jacob's feeling for Leah as compared with his feeling for Rachel?
33. Write from memory the names of Jacob's thirteen children and the names of their mothers respectively?
34. Are we justified in thinking that the Divine promise that Abraham's seed should be as the stars of the heavens in multitude was involved in any way with the motivation that produced Jacob's numerous progeny?
35. Show how the jealousy between Rachel and Leah continued to produce unpleasant consequences.
36. Explain why we speak of the sons of the two handmaids as "adopted" sons.
37. What is the import of Rachel's cry, "Give me children, or else I die"?

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38. What was Jacob's rather harsh reply to Rachel's complaints? Was it justified?
39. What, later, caused Leah to become discontented with being the mother of only four sons? What did she do about it?
40. Explain fully the story of the mandrakes. Was this pure superstition, or did it have some basis in fact?
41. How was the lad Reuben innocently involved in this?
42. How would you answer the criticism that the agricultural background shows the episode to be out of place in a nomadic setting? How does the reference to the "wheat harvest" figure in this discussion?
43. What step did Jacob take after his fourteen years of service for Leah and Rachel?
44. What is the probable explanation of Laban's statement that he had "divined" that Yahweh was blessing Jacob's endeavors?
45. What was the new contract into which Jacob entered at this time with Laban? What was the purpose of each in entering into this contract?
46. What three artifices did Jacob use to increase his wealth at Laban's expense?
47. Do we know of any real scientific evidence to support the principle of selective breeding which Jacob employed here?
48. On what grounds can we justify Jacob in resorting to such methods, if at all?
49. What was the result, in so far as Jacob was concerned, of his strategy in this selective breeding?
50. What does Scripture tell us with regard to Jacob's wealth?
51. For how long a time did Jacob continue in service for Laban? What was he doing through the last six years of this service?
52. What caused him to decide to break away from Laban and return home?

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53. What attitude did his two wives take with reference to this decision, and why?
54. What caused Jacob to depart hastily? What route did he take? Of what did his retinue consist?
55. Summarize your final evaluation of the characters of Jacob and Laban. Would you say that Laban was the more deceptive of the two? Would you justify Jacob's acts with reference to Laban? Explain your answer.

PART FORTY-TWO

THE STORY OF JACOB: HIS RETURN TO CANAAN

(Genesis 31:17—33:20)

1. *The Covenant in Gilead: The Biblical Account* (31:17-55).

17 Then Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives upon the camels; 18 and he carried away all his cattle, and all his substance which he had gathered, the cattle of his getting, which he had gathered in Paddan-aram, to go to Isaac his father unto the land of Canaan. 19 Now Laban was gone to shear his sheep: and Rachel stole the teraphim that were her father's. 20 And Jacob stole away unawares to Laban the Syrian, in that he told him not that he fled. 21 So he fled with all that he had; and he rose up, and passed over the River, and set his face toward the mountain of Gilead.

22 And it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob was fled. 23 And he took his brethren with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey; and he overtook him in the mountain of Gilead. 24 And God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream of the night, and said unto him, Take heed to thyself that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad. 25 And Laban came up with Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mountain: and Laban with his brethren encamped in the mountain of Gilead. 26 And Laban said to Jacob, What hast thou done, that thou hast stolen away unawares to me, and carried away my daughters as captives of the sword? 27 Wherefore didst thou flee secretly, and steal away from me, and didst not tell me, that I might have sent thee away with mirth and with songs, with tabret and with harp; 28 and didst not suffer me to kiss my sons and my daughters? now hast thou done foolishly. 29 It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt: but the God of your

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father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take heed to thyself that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad. 30 And now, though thou wouldest needs be gone, because thou sore longest after thy father's house, yet wherefore hast thou stolen my gods? 31 And Jacob answered and said to Laban, Because I was afraid: for I said, Lest thou shouldst take thy daughters from me by force. 32 With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, he shall not live: before our brethren discern thou what is thine with me, and take it to thee. For Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them.

33 And Laban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the tent of the two maid-servants; but he found them not. And he went out of Leah's tent, and entered into Rachel's tent. 34 Now Rachel had taken the teraphim, and put them in the camel's saddle, and sat upon them. And Laban felt about all the tent, but found them not. 35 And she said to her father, Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise up before thee; for the manner of women is upon me. And he searched, but found not the teraphim.

36 And Jacob was wroth, and chode with Laban: and Jacob answered and said to Laban, What is my trespass? what is my sin, that thou hast hotly pursued after me? 37 Whereas thou hast felt about all my stuff, what hast thou found of all thy household stuff? Set it here before my brethren and thy brethren, that they may judge betwixt us two. 38 These twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she-goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flocks have I not eaten. 39 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. 40 Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep fled from mine eyes. 41 These twenty years have I been in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy flock:

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and thou hast changed my wages ten times. 42 Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now hadst thou sent me away empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight.

43 And Laban answered and said unto Jacob, The daughters are my daughters, and the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, and all that thou seest is mine: and what can I do this day unto these daughters, or unto their children whom they have borne? 44 And now come, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee. 45 And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. 46 And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones; and they took stones, and made a heap: and they did eat there by the heap. 47 And Laban called it Jegar-saba-dutha: but Jacob called it Galeed. 48 And Laban said, This heap is witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed: 49 and Mizpah, for he said, Jehovah watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another. 50 If thou shalt afflict my daughters, and if thou shalt take wives besides my daughters, no man is with us; see, God is witness betwixt me and thee. 51 And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold the pillar, which I have set betwixt me and thee. 52 This heap be witness, and the 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. 53 The God of Abraham, and the God of Nabor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob sware by the Fear of his father Isaac. 54 And Jacob offered a sacrifice in the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mountain. 55 And early in the morning

Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them: and Laban departed and returned unto his place.

(1) *Flight and Pursuit* (vv. 17-25). It seems to have become obvious to Jacob that flight was his only way of extricating himself and his household from Laban's shiftiness. Jacob's words to his wives will be recalled here: "*Your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times,*" v. 7; that is, a round number signifying *just as often as he could* (Leupold, EG, 832). The daughters themselves joined in affirming their father's acts of exploitation—his efforts to fleece their husband—and even his avarice in his dealings with them (as if they were as of little concern to him as "foreigners" to be bought and sold at his will), vv. 14-16: "It was considered miserly if a father-in-law did not return to his daughter a part of the sum paid over by the husband at the time of marriage" (JB, 51, n.). "The point in this instance, is elucidated by tablets from Hurrian centers, is that part of the bride payment was normally reserved for the woman as her inalienable dowry. Rachel and Leah accuse their father of violating the family laws of their country. Significantly enough, the pertinent records antedate Moses by centuries" (Speiser, ABG, 245). "Rachel and Leah mean to say that what Jacob had acquired by his six years of service with their father was no more than would naturally have belonged to him had they obtained their portions at the first" (PCG, 376). The wives were already alienated from their father and willingly espoused their husband's cause. Encouraged, in addition, by the assurance of the "God of Bethel" that his vow had been accepted (28:20-22) and the accompanying Divine authorization to get out of the land where he was and return to the "land of his nativity," Jacob gathered all his possessions and departed at a most opportune time,

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namely, when Laban was away on a sheep-shearing mission. (Sheep-shearing, we are told, was the occasion of an important festival in ancient Israel [cf. Gen. 38:12ff., 1 Sam. 25:2ff., 2 Sam. 13:23]). Jacob with his retinue ("all he had"—cf. 30:43, sheep, goats, camels, asses, maid-servants, men-servants, wives, and offspring) *rose up* and *drove away*, not leisurely, but with all possible haste; flocks, of course, had to be driven carefully lest they perish from over-exertion. (Note that he set the members of his family upon camels, v. 17). Crossing the "River" (the Euphrates, cf. 1 Ki. 4:21, Ezra 4:10, 16), probably at the ancient ford at Thapsacus, the procession (one might well call it that) struck across the Damascus plain, and then the plateau of Bashan, thus finally entering the region known as Gilead, the area east of the Jordan that formed the frontier between Palestine and the Syrian desert. Gilead was a mountainous region, some sixty miles long and twenty miles wide, bounded on the north by Bashan and on the south by Moab and Ammon (Gen. 31:21, Deut. 3:12-17). (Cf. the cities of refuge, Deut. 4:41-43, namely, Bezer in the table-land, Ramoth in Gilead, and Golan in Bashan). From the crossing of the Euphrates at Thapsacus, the next objective naturally had to be the mountain of Gilead or "Mount Gilead."

Jacob had not been, and was not intending to be after his return, a nomad. V. 18—"In addition to the cattle there were other possessions of Jacob that he had acquired in Paddan-aram or Mesopotamia. . . . By a repetition of *migne*, "cattle," this part of his possessions is reverted to as 'constituting' the major part of his 'property,' *quinyano*, as K.W. well translates: *der Viehbesitz, der sein Vermoegen bildete*. The statement is rounded out by a double statement of the objective of his journey: on the one hand, he was going back 'to Isaac, his father,' under whose authority he felt he still belonged, and 'to the land of Canaan,' which according to divine decree was

ultimately destined to be the possession of his posterity. Such precise formal statements including all the major facts are wont to be made by Moses when he records a particularly momentous act. The very circumstantiality of its form makes one feel its importance—a device, by the way, quite naturally employed for similar purposes to this day. Critics miss all these finer points of style, for the supposed authors that the critics imagine have wrought out parts of Genesis (E, J, P, D) are poor fellows with one-track minds, not one of whom has the least adaptability of style, but all of whom write in a stiff, stilted fashion after one pattern only” (EG, 838-839).

Perhaps we should give more careful attention here, in passing, to Jacob's conversation with his wives prior to the flight, vv. 7-13. This section is clarified greatly by Keil and Delitzsch as follows: “From the statement that Laban had changed his wages ten times, it is evident that when Laban observed, that among his sheep and goats, of one color only, a large number of mottled young were born, he made repeated attempts to limit the original stipulation by changing the rule as to the colors of the young, and so diminishing Jacob's wages. But when Jacob passes over his own stratagem in silence, and represents all that he aimed at and secured by crafty means as the fruit of God's blessing, this differs no doubt from the account in chapter 30. It is not a contradiction, however, pointing to a difference in the sources of the two chapters, but merely a difference founded on actual fact, viz., that Jacob did not tell the whole truth to his wives. Moreover, self-help and divine help do not exclude one another. Hence, his account of the dream, in which he saw that the rams that leaped upon the cattle were all of various colors, and heard the voice of the angel of God calling his attention to what had been seen, in the words, *‘I have seen all that Laban hath done to thee,’* may contain actual truth; and the dream may be regarded as a divine

revelation, which was either sent to explain to him now, at the end of the sixth year, 'that it was not his stratagem, but the providence of God which had prevented him from falling a victim to Laban's avarice, and had brought him such wealth' (*Delitzsch*); or, if the dream occurred at an earlier period, was meant to teach him, that 'the help of God, without any such self-help, could procure him justice and safety in spite of Laban's covetousness' (*Kurtz*). It is very difficult to decide between these two interpretations. As Jehovah's instructions to him to return were not given till the end of his period of service, and Jacob connects them so closely with the vision of the rams that they seem contemporaneous, *Delitzsch's* view appears to deserve the preference. But the participial form in verse 12, "*all that Laban is doing to thee,*" does not exactly suit this meaning. . . . The participle rather favors *Kurtz's* view, that Jacob had the vision of the rams and the explanation from the angel at the beginning of the last six years of service, but that in his communication to his wives, in which there was no necessity to preserve a strict continuity or distinction of time, he connected it with the divine instructions to return to his home, which he received at the end of his time of service. But if we decide in favor of this view, we have no further guarantee for the objective reality of the vision of the rams, since nothing is said about it in the historical account, and it is nowhere stated that the wealth obtained by Jacob's craftiness was the result of the divine blessing. The attempt so unmistakably apparent in Jacob's whole conversation with his wives, to place his dealings with Laban in the most favorable light for himself, excites the suspicion, that the vision of which he spoke was nothing more than a natural dream, the materials being supplied by the three thoughts that were most frequently in his mind, by night as well as by day, viz., (1) his own schemes and their success; (2) the promise received at Bethel; (3) the wish to justify his

actions to his own conscience; and that these were wrought up by an excited imagination into a visionary dream, of the divine origin of which Jacob himself may not have had the slightest doubt" (BCOTP, 295, 296).

We pause to say here, that *Jacob did outwit Laban*. Moreover, it is expressly emphasized that he outwitted Laban "the Syrian" (Hebrew, *Aramean*: vv. 20, 24). We are compelled to wonder whether this specific designation is designed to point up the fact of Laban's "ingrained trickery," an art which he practised on Jacob at every turn. History seems to show that from most ancient times to the present the Syrians were, and are, the prime trouble-makers in the Near East. Bowie rightly suggests that "the chronicler must have set down this account with a very human and perhaps unregenerate pleasure. Here was Jacob, the progenitor of Israel, outsmarting the uncovenanted Laban. From a natural point of view that seemed eminently appropriate. More than once Laban had deliberately cheated Jacob. He had promised him Rachel to wife, and after Jacob had served seven years for her he withheld Rachel and gave him Leah instead. According to Jacob, Laban had also changed his wages ten times (31:7). Jacob had good reason therefore to be suspicious when Laban tried to persuade him to stay and work for him further (vs. 27), and all the more so when Laban had added unctuously, *for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake*. Anybody would have said that if Laban could now be cheated in his turn, it would be what he thoroughly deserved. As a matter of fact, Jacob does not cheat him. He carries through exactly the terms of an agreement which he had proposed to Laban, and which Laban explicitly accepted. He was not false like Laban: he was more inventive and adroit. When he had proposed to Laban that all he asked in the way of wages was that little fraction of the flock which might be odd in color,

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that seemed to Laban a highly desirable bargain, especially since he, Laban, took the opportunity then and there to remove from the flock all the sheep and goats that might breed the type that would belong to Jacob. The trouble was that he did not foresee the extraordinary device by which Jacob would be able to make the flock breed according to his interest—a device not ruled out by the bargain. So by every secular standard Jacob was entitled to his triumph.” However, Dr. Bowie goes on to say, “the interest of the story lies in the fact that the narrator was not judging by secular standards. He believed that Jacob’s triumph was directly linked to his religion. He describes Jacob as saying to Rachel and Leah, ‘God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me’ (31:9). Moreover, an angel appears to Jacob and gives him God’s message thus: ‘I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee. I am the God of Bethel . . . where thou vowedst a vow unto me’ (31:12-13). In other words, Jacob’s clever stratagem and the success it brought him are the result of the commitment which he believed God had given to him at Bethel to make him prosperous. A curious blending of the earthy and the heavenly—a blending which one must recognize to exist in part of the O.T. and in influences which have flowed from it! The people of Israel were convinced that there is an intimate relationship between favor with heaven and material well-being in this world. The positive aspect of that was to give powerful sanction to keen-wittedness and commercial sagacity, so that the Jew in many practical matters has exhibited an intelligence greater than that of his non-Jewish rival. As with Jacob in his contest with Laban, he can show that he deserves to win. The negative aspect is of course the implication that prosperity ought to be the concomitant of religion. That is not confined to Judaism. John Calvin, who was greatly influenced by the O.T., tended to make it appear that the Christian

citizen, sturdy and reliant, would be more evidently a man of God if he was a success in business. It is true that there are qualities inspired by religion—integrity, diligence, faithfulness in familiar duties—which may bring this world's goods as their result. But to look toward these as a necessary reward of religion is to dishonor the love of God, which must be sought for itself, by trying to make it an instrument of our selfishness. It is not in Jacob's outwitting Laban that we see the true end of worship. It is rather in Jesus, who, 'though he was rich, yet for your sakes . . . became poor' (2 Cor. 8:9)" (IBG, 707-710). (*We must agree wholeheartedly with this expositor's thesis that an abundance of material goods is not a necessary reward of religion*, least of all of the Christian religion. We know of no Scriptures, either in the Old Testament or in the New, that would ascribe *either unusual material wealth or poverty* to God's special providence, *i.e.*, outside the general operation of economic cause-and-effect relationships, and these in relation to individual human character and effort. The divine ordinance that man shall earn his livelihood by honest labor, mental or physical or both (Gen. 3:19) has never been rescinded. Why, then, ascribe the notion of this correlation of material goods with religious commitment to the "chronicler's" attitude in the case before us, when as a matter of fact the whole affair is presented as a series of Jacob's own assumptions (or presumptions). As a matter of fact, all that is implicit in the account given in ch. 28:20-22, in the matter of material possessions, is simply "bread to eat and raiment to put on." These simple needs of everyday life are certainly a far cry from the contest waged between Jacob and Laban for this world's goods. Cf. John 5:40, 10:10; Matt. 6:19-34; Luke 8:14, 18:24; Mark 14:7; John 16:33; Col. 3:5; 1 Tim. 6:10; Jas. 5:1-6, etc.).

The following evaluation of Jacob's conduct seems to be unbiased and just: "The deceit which Jacob practiced on Esau was returned to him by Laban, who practiced the same kind of deceit. For all of that, however, Jacob was under the covenant care of God and did not come out a loser in the end. Yet in later years Jacob's own sons practiced on him a similar form of deceit in connection with Joseph's abduction (37:32-36)" (HSB, 48, n.).

(2) *The Teraphim* (v. 19).

Jacob's flight with all his "substance" occurred at a time when the important task of sheep-shearing was engrossing Laban's attention. This means that the latter was at some distance from Jacob's flocks (30:36), and since all hands would be kept quite busy for a few days, no time could have been more opportune. Moreover, because her father was away from home, Rachel had a chance to carry out a special project of her own: *she stole the teraphim that were her father's*. Evidently these were her household gods. The plural may be a plural of excellence after the pattern of the name *Elohim*, and so only one image may have been involved. Whether these were larger, almost man-sized as 1 Sam. 19:13, 16 seems to suggest, or actually were only the small figurines yielded by excavations in Palestine matters little, as both types may have been in use. Apparently they were regarded as promoting domestic prosperity, and thus were a kind of gods of the hearth like the Roman *Penates*. "The teraphim was a god (31:30); its form and size were those of a man (1 Sam. 19:13, 16); it was used in private houses as well as in temples (Judg. 17:5, 18:14ff., Hos. 3:4), and was an implement of divination (Ezek. 2:21, Zech. 10:2). The indications point to its being an emblem of ancestor-worship which survived in Israel as a private superstition, condemned by the enlightened conscience of the nation (Gen. 35:2, 1 Sam. 15:23, 2 Ki. 23:24). It seems implied by the present narrative that the cult was

borrowed from the Arameans, or perhaps rather that it had existed before the separation of Hebrews and Arameans" (ICCG, 396). These were "household gods, idols of clay or metal" (HSB, 51, n.). It will be noted that in the narrative before us, Laban calls these objects "gods"; when Jacob does the same, he is probably only quoting Laban, vv. 30, 32). "The teraphim were the family or household gods represented in the form of idols. They varied in size. Those of Laban were small enough to be put in the pack-saddle of a camel upon which Rachel sat. 1 Samuel 19:13 speaks of such an image in the house of David, approximately of human size and shape. In ancient Israel the use of the teraphim seems to have been common, and not at all inconsistent with the pure worship of Israel's God: Judg. ch. 17, 18:14, 17, 18, 20; 1 Sam. 19:13; Hos. 3:4" (Morganstern, JIBG, *in loco*). "It seems hardly fair to assume that the Israelites carelessly carried these household divinities over from the time of these early Mesopotamian contacts and continued to use them almost uninterruptedly. When Michal happens to have such a figure handy (1 Sam. 19), that is not as yet proof that from Rachel's day to Michal's Israel had quite carelessly tolerated them. We should rather say that whenever Israel lapsed into idolatry, especially in Canaan, then the backsliders would also adapt themselves to the teraphim cult. Hos. 3:4 by no means lists them as legitimate objects of worship" (EG, 840).

Of greater significance to us, however, is the question, *Why did Rachel steal this teraphim?* "To be rejected are such conjectures as merely to play her father a prank; or to take them for their intrinsic worth, supposing that they were gold or silver figurines; or to employ a drastic or almost fanatical mode of seeking to break her father's idolatry—views current among Jewish commentators and early church fathers and to some extent to this day. More nearly correct might seem to be the opinion which suggests

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that she aimed to deprive her father of the blessings which might have been conferred by them. Most reasonable of all, though it does not exclude the last-mentioned view, is the supposition that Rachel took them along for her own use, being herself somewhat given to superstitious or idolatrous practices. For though 30:23-24 suggest a measure of faith and of knowledge of the true God, even as Jehovah, yet it would seem that as a true daughter of her father she had been addicted to his religion and now had a kind of divided allegiance, trusting in Jehovah and not wanting to be deprived of the good luck teraphim might confer. In any case, since she took what did not belong to her, she is guilty of theft—she 'stole'" (EG, 840). "The rabbis sought to excuse Rachel's theft by saying she took the teraphim because she feared they might disclose Jacob's whereabouts to Laban. Actually, the story gives no motive for her theft, unless it be that suggested, in the lesson, to prove the superiority of Jacob's God over the gods of Laban. For this reason probably the story told with considerable gusto not only that Rachel stole these gods, which were powerless to defend themselves, but also that she subjected them to greater indignity by sitting on them (v. 34). Use of teraphim became regarded as inconsistent with the pure worship of God and was prohibited: 2 Ki. 23:24; cf. 1 Sam. 15:23" (Morganstern, *ibid.*). "They were used for divination; hence she stole them that they should not reveal to Laban that Jacob had fled [Rashbam]. They were idols, and she stole them in order to keep Laban from idolatry [Rashi]. E [Abraham Ibn Ezra] inclines to the former reason, for if the latter were her purpose, she should have hidden them and not taken them with her. As for the *teraphim*, E mentions two views: that it was a kind of clock, or an image which was so made that at certain times it spoke. His own opinion is that it was a kind of dummy which could be mistaken for a human being, the proof being

that Michal deceived David's pursuers by putting teraphim in the bed, which they mistook for David (1 Sam. 19:13ff.). N [Nachmanides] also quotes the story of Michal, from which he deduced that not all teraphim were worshipped as idols, for in that case David would certainly not have possessed them. He conjectures that it was an object used to foretell the future (apparently a kind of fortune-telling clock). Men of little faith therefore worshipped it as an idol" (SC, 182). "Probably it is true . . . that the main purpose for the mention of the images is to disparage Laban for the superstitious value he put on them, and by contrast to indicate that Jacob was superior to such things. In that case, Rachel's sitting upon them would be only another stroke in the picture of the idols' degradation. But there is another road on which imagination travels. Suppose that Rachel sat upon the images not to make her father's search for them ridiculous, but because she craved to keep them for herself. Then that might be taken as evidence simply of pathetic superstition on her part; but it is possible to see in it something more than that. Suppose that on her way to an unfamiliar country and to a strange new relationship, Rachel wanted to carry with her what had been significant at home. That can be a wholesome human instinct. None of us is isolated and self-sufficient. The meaning of life is bound up with the complex of associations of the family or the group. If these are altogether left behind, the human being will be lonely and lost" (IBG, 713).

Lange: "Literally, Teraphim, Penates, small figures, probably resembling the human form, which were honored as guardians of the household property, and as oracles. But as we must distinguish the symbolic adoration of religious images (statuettes) among ancients, from the true and proper mythological worship, so we must distinguish between a gentler and severe censure of the use of such images upon Shemitic ground. Doubtless the symbolic

usage prevailed in the house of Laban and Nahor. It is hardly probable that Rachel intended, by a pious and fanatical theft, to free her father from idolatry (Gregory Nazianzen, Basil), for then she would have thrown the images away. She appears to have stolen them with the superstitious idea that she would prevent her father from consulting them as oracles, and under their guidance, as the pursuer of Jacob, from overtaking him and destroying him (Ibn Ezra). The supposition of a condition of war, with its necessity and strategy, enters here with apologetic force. This, however, does not exclude the idea, that she attributed to the images a certain magical, though not religious, power (perhaps, as oracles. Chrysostom). The very lowest and most degrading supposition, is that she took the images, often overlaid with silver, or precious metals, from mercenary motives (Peirerius). Jacob himself had at first a lax rather than a strict conscience in regard to these images (see ch. 35:2), but the stricter view prevails since the time of Moses (Exo. 20, Josh. 24:2, 14f.) The derivation of the Hebrew word *teraphim*, always used in the plural, is doubtful. Some derive it from *taraph*, to rejoice—thus dispensers of good; others, from a like root, to inquire—thus they are oracles; and others, like Kurtz and Hofmann, make it another form of *Seraphim*. They were regarded and used as oracles (Judg. 17:5-6, Ezek. 21:21, Zech. 10:2). They were not idols in the worst sense of the word, and were sometimes used by those who professed the worship of the true god (1 Sam. 19:13). The tendency was always hurtful, and they were ultimately rooted out from Israel. Laban had lapsed into a more corrupt form of religion, and his daughters had not escaped the infection. We may modify our views of Rachel's sin, but it cannot be excused or justified" (CDHCG, 542). With the last statement in the foregoing we must agree. However, Rachel's theft of Laban's *teraphim* (which undoubtedly were figurines or

images in human form) is much better understood today, in the light of the documents from Nuzi, not far from modern Kirkuk, excavated 1925-1934. "In Hebrew *teraphim*, small domestic idols; possession of these could constitute a claim to inheritance" (JB, 51, n.). "The teraphim, which Rachel successfully hid while Laban searched all of Jacob's possessions, may have had more legal than religious significance for Laban. According to Nuzu law, a son-in-law who possessed the household idols might claim the family inheritance in court. Thus Rachel was trying to obtain some advantage for her husband by stealing the idols. But Laban nullified any such benefit by a covenant with Jacob before they separated" (Schultz, OTS, 36). "Then Rachel did an extraordinary thing without Jacob's knowledge. She stole the 'teraphim,' Laban's family gods, or household idols. The custom was that Laban's true son would share inheritance, and receive the teraphim, symbol of his rights. Only if there were no son would Jacob possess them. Rachel's act was therefore designed to secure an advantage for her husband and children. It is not likely in this case that the teraphim conveyed ownership of valuable property as Rachel was leaving the territory of her father. They may have betokened clan-leadership in the 'land of the people of the east,' or spiritual power, so that possessing them was of paramount importance" (Cornfeld, AtD, 87). V. 19—"Rachel stole the *teraphim*." "*Appropriated*, also v. 32. Heb. stem *gnb*, which usually means 'to steal.' But it also has other shadings in idiomatic usage. Thus the very next clause employs the same verb, no doubt deliberately and with telling effect, in the phrase 'lulling the mind,' *i.e.*, stealing the heart; the phrase is repeated in 26; in 27, with Laban speaking, the verb is used by itself in the sense of 'to dupe.' Finally, in v. 29, the passive participle occurs (twice) to designate animals snatched by wild beasts. The range of *gnb* is thus much broader, in Heb. in general, and in the present

narrative in particular, than our 'to steal' would indicate. A reasonably precise translation is especially important in this instance. The issue is bound up with the purpose of Rachel's act. If it was inspired by no more than a whim, or resentment, or greed, then Rachel stole the images. But if she meant thereby to undo what she regarded as a wrong, and thus took the law, as she saw it, into her own hands, the translation 'stole' would be not only inadequate but misleading. On the other hand, when Laban refers to the same act further down (v. 30), he clearly meant 'steal' " (Speiser, ABG, 245).

Whitelaw summarizes fully, as follows: "The teraphim, from an unused root, *taraph*, signifying to live comfortably, like the Sanscrit *trip*, Greek *trepheim*, Arabic *tarafa* (Gesenius, Furst) appear to have been small human figures (cf. 31:34), though the image in 1 Sam. 19:13 must have been nearly life-sized, or a full-sized bust, sometimes made of silver (Judges 17:4), though commonly constructed of wood (1 Sam. 19:13-16); they were worshipped as gods (eidola, LXX; *idola*, Vulgate, cf. ch. 31:30), consulted for oracles (Ezek. 21:21, Zech. 10:2), and believed to be the custodians and promoters of human happiness (Judg. 18:24). Probably derived from the Arameans (Furst, Kurtz), or the Chaldeans (Ezek. 21:21, Kalisch, Wordsworth), the worship of teraphim was subsequently denounced as idolatrous (1 Sam. 15:23, 2 Ki. 13:24). (Compare Rachel's act with that ascribed to Aeneas, in Virgil, *Aeneid*, III, 148-150). Rachel's motive for abstracting her father's teraphim has been variously attributed to a desire to prevent her father from discovering, by inquiring at his gods, the direction of their flight (Aben Ezra, Rosenmuller), to protect herself, in case of being overtaken, by an appeal to her father's gods (Josephus), to draw her father from the practice of idolatry (Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Theodoret), to obtain children for herself through their assistance (Lengerke,

Gerlach), to preserve a memorial of her ancestors, whose pictures these teraphim were (Lightfoot); but was probably due to avarice, if the images were made of precious metals (Peirerius), or to a taint of superstition which still adhered to her otherwise religious nature (Chrysostom, Calvin), causing her to look to these idols for protection (Kalisch, Murphy) or consultation (Wordsworth) on her journey" (PCG, 376).

We have presented these various theories as to the nature of the teraphim and Rachel's motives in stealing them to show how great is the scope of speculation on these subjects. We terminate this study with what we consider to be the sanest and most thoroughgoing presentation of it, as follows: "The teraphim were figurines or images in human form. Rachel's theft of Laban's teraphim (Gen. 31:34) is much better understood in the light of the documents from Nuzu, not far from modern Kirkuk, excavated 1925-1934. The possession of these household gods apparently implied leadership of the family and, in the case of a married daughter, assured her husband the right to the property of her father. Since Laban evidently had sons of his own when Jacob left for Canaan, they alone had the right to their father's gods, and the theft of these household idols by Rachel was a serious offense (Gen. 31:19, 31, 35) aimed at preserving for her husband the first title to her father's estate. Albright construes the teraphim as meaning 'vile things,' but the images were not necessarily cultic or lewd, as frequently the depictions of Astarte were. Micah's teraphim (Judg. 17:15) were used for purposes of securing an oracle (cf. 1 Sam. 15:23, Hos. 3:4; Zech. 10:2). Babylonian kings oracularly consulted the teraphim (Ezek. 21:21). Josiah abolished the teraphim (2 Ki. 23:24), but these images had a strange hold on the Hebrew people even until after the Exilic Period" (Unger, UBD, 1085). The present writer finds it difficult to disassociate these objects from

some aspect of the Cult of Fertility—the worship of the Earth-mother and the Sun-father—which was so widespread throughout the ancient pagan world; cf. the Apostle's description, Rom. 1:18-32. Every phase of this Cult of Fertility reeked with sex perversions of every kind, including ritual prostitution and phallic worship: remains of this cult have been brought to light in recent years by the discovery of hundreds of figurines of pregnant women throughout the Mediterranean world. Crete seems to have been the center from which this cult became diffused throughout the ancient world. The Children of Israel had to battle this cult from the time of their origin as a people, and apparently were always influenced to it by some extent: cf. the moral struggle of the prophet Elijah with the wicked queen Jezebel. It is our conviction that Rachel "appropriated" these (surely more likely than *this*) teraphim with the intention of using them for whatever ends they were supposed by her paternal household to serve. That the legal aspect, as indicated by the Nuzi records, could have been a very important part of her objective seems to be both historical and reasonable. However, we cannot get away from the basic conviction that Rachel was imbued with the spirit of paganism which seems to have characterized her people generally. Even Jacob himself and his people were not immunized against this cultism (cf. Gen. 35:2-4; Josh. 24:2, 14f.; Judg. 10:16). Again quoting Lange: "Laban had lapsed into a more corrupt form of religion, and his daughters had not escaped the infection. We may modify our views of Rachel's sin, but it cannot be excused or justified."

(3) *Laban the Syrian* (v. 24), in *Hebrew, Aramean*. "The Arameans were an important branch of the Semitic race, and closely akin to the Israelites. The kingdom of Damascus or Syria, during the ninth and eighth centuries B.C., the most powerful and dangerous rival of the northern kingdom of Israel, was the leading Aramean state.

The language of the Aramean tribes and states consisted of several closely related dialects. After the Exile, Aramean gradually supplanted Hebrew as the vernacular of the Jewish people. Certain portions of the Bible (Jer. 10:11, Dan. 2:4—7:28, Ezra 4:8—6:18, 7:12-26) are written in Aramaic, as are considerable portions of rabbinic literature" (Morganstern, JIBG). (Our Lord Himself spoke Galilean Aramaic, cf. Matt. 27:46). The progenitor of the Aramean peoples was Aram, the son of Shem (Gen. 10:22-23). These peoples spread widely through Syria and Mesopotamia from the Lebanon Mountains on the west to the Euphrates River on the east, and from the Taurus Range on the north to Damascus and northern Palestine on the south. Contacts of the Arameans with the Hebrews began in the patriarchal age, if not earlier (cf. Paddan-aram, "the plain of Aram," Gen. 24:10, 28:5, 31:47). The maternal ancestry of Jacob's children was Aramaic (Deut. 26:5). During the long period of Israel's sojourn in Egypt, that of the wanderings in the Sinaitic Wilderness, and the extended period of the Judges in Canaan, the Arameans were spreading in every direction, particularly southward. By the time of the reign of Saul (c. 1000 B.C.), this expansion was beginning to clash with Israelite strength and several Aramaic districts appear prominently in the Old Testament Scriptures. (See UBG, s.v. "Aram," "Aramaic"). The Greeks called Aram, "Syria"; consequently the language is called "Syriac" (Dan. 2:4). David conquered these Aramean kingdoms at his very back door and incorporated them into his kingdom, thus laying the foundation of Solomon's empire. (*Aram-Naharaim*, "Aram of the Two Rivers," was the name by which the territory around Haran was known; the region where the Arameans had settled in patriarchal times, where Abraham sojourned for a time, and from which Aramean power spread. *Aram-Damascus* was a south Syrian state which became the inveterate foe of the Northern Kingdom of Israel for

more than a century and a half (1 Ki. 11:23-25). *Aram-Zobah*, a powerful kingdom which flourished north of Hamath, was conquered by David and incorporated into his realm (2 Sam., ch. 8). *Aram-Maachab* was a principality east of the Jordan near Mount Hermon (Josh. 12:5, 13:11). *Aram-Beth-Rehob* in the general vicinity of Geshur, probably near Maacah and Dan (Num. 13:21, Judg. 18:28). *Geshur* was a small principality east of the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee (Deut. 3:14, 2 Sam. 15:8, 13:37). *Tob* was also a small Aramaic principality east of the Jordan, some ten miles south of Gadara, (the region from which the Ammonite king drew soldiers to war against David. A battle ensued in which the "Syrians" were routed (2 Sam. 10:8-19). Vv. 20, 24—*Laban the Aramean*: "The reason for this apposition is puzzling. It hardly grows out of the Hebrew national consciousness which here proudly asserts itself. Perhaps the opinion advanced by Clericus still deserves most consideration. He believes Laban's nationality is mentioned because the Syrians were known from of old as the trickiest people; here one of this people in a kind of just retribution meets one trickier than himself. Yet this is not written to glorify trickery" (EG, 841).

Three days after Jacob's flight, the news of it reached Laban, who was already three days removed from Jacob and his retinue at the time the latter set out on his journey homeward. Laban set out after him—"pursued after him seven days' journey" (v. 23) "and overtook him in the mountain of Gilead." Skinner contends that "the distance of Gilead from Harran (c. 350 miles as the crow flies) is much too great to be traversed in that time (ICCG, 397). Speiser writes: "'a distance of seven days.' This is meant as a general figure indicating a distance of considerable length: cf. 2 Ki. 3:9. Actually, Gilead could scarcely have been reached from Har(r)an in seven days, especially at the pace of Jacob's livestock" (ABG, 246).

Leupold suggests as follows: "Some have computed that the distance involved is about 350 miles as the crow flies. This need not necessarily be assumed. We have accurate maps that represent it to be no more than about 275 miles to the fringes of Mount Gilead. Besides, in shifting his grazing ground Jacob may have so arranged things before he took his flight in hand as to gravitate some three days' journey to the south of Haran—certainly not an impossibility. If only fifteen miles constituted an average day's journey, the total distance would be cut down to almost 200 miles. Now, certainly, Jacob will have pressed on faster than the average day's journey, perhaps at the cost of the loss of a bit of cattle. The cooler part of the day and portions of the night may have been utilized in order to spare the cattle. Then, too, the boundaries of Gilead may originally have extended nearer to Damascus. . . . K.G. (Koenig's *Commentary* on Genesis) shows that 'Gilead' is used for the country east of the Jordan in general" (EG, 843). We see no valid reason for the assumption that the distance specified was too great to fit the time period specified. The following quotes seem to make this clear. "*It was told Laban on the third day,*" etc., i.e., the third after Jacob's departure, the distance between the two sheep-stations being a three days' journey, cf. 30:36. . . . The distance between Padan-aram and mount Gilead was a little over 300 miles, to perform which Jacob must at least have taken ten days, though Laban, who was less encumbered than his son-in-law, accomplished it in seven, which might easily be done by traveling from forty to forty-five miles a day, by no means a great feat for a camel" (PCG, 379). The following seems to clarify the situation beyond any reasonable doubt: "A three days' distance separated them in the first place, and another three days were required for a messenger to go and inform Laban. At the time of the messenger's arrival Jacob was six days' journey distant. Since Laban caught up with him on the next

day, he covered in one day what took Jacob seven days (Rashi). Sh (Rashbam) points out that this was natural since Jacob would be traveling slowly on account of the flocks" (SC, 182). Murphy suggests the following explanation: "On the third day after the arrival of the messenger, Laban might return to the spot whence Jacob had taken his flight. In this case, Jacob would have at least five days of a start; which, added to the seven days of pursuit, would give him twelve days to travel three hundred English miles. To those accustomed to the pastoral life this was a possible achievement" (MG, 406). Lange writes: "As Jacob, with his herds, moved slower than Laban, he lost his start of three days in the course of seven days" (CDHCG, 542). At any rate, no sooner did the information reach Laban that Jacob had fled than he set out in pursuit, and, being unencumbered, he advanced rapidly; whereas Jacob, with a young family and numerous flocks, had to move rather slowly, so that Laban overtook the fugitives after seven days' journey, as they lay encamped on brow of mount Gilead, an extensive range of mountains that formed the eastern boundary of Canaan. The mountains constituting the northern portion of the land of Gilead, which lay between the Yarmuk on the north and the Arnon on the south, was divided at about one-third of the distance by the deep valley of the Jabbok, "which cleaves the mountains to their base." This territory, in its whole length, is often spoken of as the land of Gilead, but rarely as Mount Gilead. The portions north and south of the Jabbok are each spoken of as "half Gilead" (Josh. 12:2, 5; 13:31; Deut. 3:12). Evidently it was in this "mount Gilead" that Laban overtook Jacob.

(4) *The Altercation*, (vv. 26-42). Laban evidently reached the "mount of Gilead" toward the end of the seventh day, and seeing Jacob's tents not too far away, he lodged over night where he had halted. It was during the night that Laban had the dream, v. 29. Evidently the

idea suggested is that Jacob and Laban were encamped, each on a different foothill. "In the case of Laban the specific statement that it was 'Mount Gilead' where the tents were pitched makes it entirely plain that both had pitched on the same mountain though over against one another. The critical correction, which tries to put Jacob on Mount Mizpah, grows out of the desire to prove that two threads of narrative intertwine. Critics are continually, though often unwittingly, 'doctoring up' the evidence" (EG, 844). When the two men came face to face the next morning, Laban, blustering and simulating righteous indignation, demands to know why Jacob has so deceived him, trying to present the latter's action in the most unfavorable light. "Laban is as much aware of the extent of his exaggeration as are all others who hear him. At the same time he himself knows best why Jacob fled secretly and without announcement" (EG, 845). Laban claims that he could do Jacob "hurt," when he knows he has no intention of doing so after having received a direct warning from God against that very thing. He is merely boasting. "Being accompanied by a number of his people, Laban might have used violence, had he not been Divinely warned in a dream to give no interruption to his nephew's journey. *Josephus* says that he reached the neighborhood of mount Gilead 'at eventide.' And having resolved not to disturb Jacob's encampment till the morning, it was during the intervening night that he had the warning dream, in which God told him, that if he (Laban) despised their small number, and attacked them in a hostile manner, He would Himself assist them (*Antiquities*, I, 19, 10). How striking and sudden a change! For several days he had been full of rage, and was now in eager anticipation that his vengeance would be fully wreaked, when lo! his hands are tied by invisible power (Psa. 76:10). He dared not touch Jacob, but there was a war of words" (CECG, 210). God's warning had been explicit: *he was*

to speak to Jacob neither good or bad, that is, "nothing at all" (JB), "not pass from peaceful greetings to acrimonious" (Lange), "not say anything acrimonious or violent against Jacob" (Murphy). Or, perhaps the expression was simply a proverbial phrase for opposition or interference of any kind (Kalisch). At any rate, Laban plays the role of an outraged parent and grandparent. Smooth hypocrite that he is, he "offers a sentimental pretext for his warlike demonstration, that is, his slighted affection for his offspring and his desire to honor a parting guest" (Skinner). Incidentally, this manner of speeding a parting guest (*i.e.*, with mirth, songs, tabret, and harp) is not mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament; in New Testament terms it would be designated "revelings" (Gal. 5:21). Laban's recriminations are threefold: the secret flight, the carrying off of his daughters, and the theft of his gods. Obviously, the last-named charge was a very serious matter to Laban; hence it led to the chief scene of the altercation. We cannot avoid the impression that he was far more concerned about his "gods" than about the welfare of his daughters. "The meaning is this: even if thy secret departure can be explained, the stealing of my gods cannot." To Laban's hypocritical approach, Jacob replied with bluntness, specifying the hardships of his twenty years' service and the attempts to defraud him of his hire. Knowing nothing of Rachel's theft of the teraphim, Jacob proved to be so sure of the innocence of his household that he offered to give up the culprit to death if the theft could be proved. (As we have noted heretofore, for Laban these "gods" had more *legal* than religious import: according to Nuzi law, a son-in-law who possessed the household idols might claim the family inheritance in court. Laban intended to have nothing of that kind to happen.) Jacob admitted bluntly that he had resorted to flight because he feared that his father-in-law would take the daughters away from him by force. Whereupon,

Laban, with Jacob's permission, proceeded to search the tents of his son-in-law, his two daughters, and the two maid-servants. He searched Rachel's tent last. Rachel, too, resorted to a stratagem: she had taken the teraphim and concealed them in the camel's litter (pack-saddle), on which she apparently was resting within her tent. When her father entered, she apologized for not rising, pleading "the manner of women" that was upon her, which made her ceremonially unclean (cf. Lev. 15:19-23). Of course Laban's search was all in vain. "Since Jacob's cause was just and since he had just been charged with theft, Jacob feels the necessity of answering the last question or charge. He is so sure that no one would have been guilty of such a deed that he boldly asserts that the thief shall die, should he be found. Such a punishment for such a crime may have been suggested by the prevalent attitude of the times reflected in the Code of Hammurabi—a few centuries old by this time—that they who stole the property of a god (or temple) should die. Yet, though in himself entirely certain of his ground, Jacob ought never to have made such an assertion. Seemingly Jacob feels this, for as he invites the search, he merely asks Laban to take whatever he thinks Jacob or his retinue have taken wrongfully; he does not again threaten the death of the idol thief. That nothing be covered up Jacob asks that the search be made 'in the presence of our kinsmen.' Finally the necessary explanation that Jacob had never for a moment thought Rachel capable of such a deed" (EG, 848). Laban then proceeded to search Jacob's tent, and Leah's, and the tent of the two maid-servants, but he did not find the teraphim. Again: "The two maid-servants are inserted parenthetically for completeness' sake. Separate tents for the husband and the wives and the handmaidens apparently were the rule in those days. Disregarding the parenthesis, the writer goes on, working up to the climax of the search: he (Laban) came out of Leah's tent and entered

into Rachel's. Rachel is a match for her father in craftiness. She has taken the teraphim and put them into the 'camel's litter,' a capacious saddle with wicker basket attachments on either side. Some describe it as a palanquin. Apparently it was so constructed that even when it was removed from the camel it offered a convenient seat for travelers. Laban feels over everything in the tent. The litter is all that remains. Had Rachel raised her protestation or excuse before this time she would have aroused suspicion. By waiting to the last critical moment she diverts attention from the fact that she might be sitting upon the teraphim. For who would care to trouble a menstruating woman suffering pain? Because, it may have actually been true what she was asserting. Nothing appears here of the taboo that some tribes and races associated with women in this condition, taboos which temporarily rendered such women untouchable. So Jacob appeared satisfied, for a painstaking search revealed no theft. We may well wonder what he would have done if Rachel's theft had come to light" (EG, 848). Jamieson disagrees to some extent: "Tents are of two descriptions—the family tent and the single tent. With the patriarchs the latter seem to have been the kind used (see 18:9, 10), especially in traveling, as recommended by its convenience, and formed in the manner described in the passage just referred to. The patriarch had the principal tent, and each of his wives, even the married handmaids and concubines, had their separate tents also. A personal scrutiny was made by Laban, who examined every tent; and having entered Rachel's last, would have infallibly discovered the stolen images, had not Rachel made an appeal to him which prevented further search. . . . She availed herself of a notion which seems to have obtained in patriarchal times, and which was afterwards enacted in the Mosaic Code as a law, that a woman in the alleged circumstances was unclean, and communicated a taint to everything with

which she came into contact. It was a mere pretext, however, on the part of Rachel, to avoid the further researches of her father" (CECG, 211). "The fact that Laban passed over Rachel's seat because of her pretended condition, does not presuppose the Levitical law in Lev. 15:9ff., according to which, any one who touched the couch or seat of such a woman was rendered unclean. For, in the first place, the view which lies at the foundation of this law was much older than the laws of Moses, and is met with among many other nations; consequently Laban might refrain from making further examinations, less from fear of defilement, than because he regarded it as impossible that any one with the custom of women upon her should sit upon his gods" (BCOTP, 298. To Jacob, undoubtedly, this minute search of Rachel's tent was the crowning indignity. (It should be noted, in passing that Rachel, by "covering her theft by subtlety and untruth," v. 35, proved herself a true daughter of Laban, and "showed with how much imperfection her religious character was tainted." "*I cannot rise up before thee*"; although Oriental politeness required children to rise up in the presence of their parents (cf. Lev. 19:32, 1 Ki. 2:19), in this case the apology was unnecessary: the plea of "the manner of women" (Gen. 18:11) made her ceremonially unclean, and indeed separate (or untouchable, Lev. 15:19). Some hold that this was a mere pretext on Rachel's part to prevent further searching by her father: she was indeed "a match for her father in craftiness.")

Jacob's pent-up emotions for years now breaks forth boldly and bluntly with mounting wrath. He challenges Laban to set forth before all their kinsmen whatsoever of his own he may have found in the course of his search. The kinsmen could serve as arbiters to render a fair public verdict in the presence of representatives of both parties to the altercation. "This challenge must have embarrassed even thick-skinned old Laban." "Although he [Jacob]

had given Laban permission to make the search, it was because he thought that one of the servants might have stolen the teraphim. Now that they were not found, he suspected that the story of the theft was merely a pretext to enable him to make a general search" (SC, 184), Jacob pours out his own recriminations: (1) the hardships of his twenty years' service, and (2) the attempts to defraud him of his hire. All the submerged suffering and frustration for twenty years now comes to the surface. First of all he was deceived about Leah and Rachel. He had not been in the home of his uncle Laban a month before he was put to work (29:15). His industriousness had been unfaltering. His wages had been changed ten times, and we may be sure they were not raised each time. "Jacob's twenty years with Laban had taught him that God's man cannot live by cleverness." "The children of this world are . . . wiser than the children of light" (Luke 16:8). Note especially vv. 38, 39: A custom of the East provided that as long as the shepherd could lay before the owner the torn beast, that was accounted sufficient evidence that the shepherd had driven off the predatory animal. But Jacob was accorded no such consideration: he was held accountable. The particular law in the Code of Hammurabi (par. 266) reads: "If there occurs in the fold an act of god, or a lion takes a life, the shepherd shall clear himself before the deity; the owner of the fold must then accept the loss incurred." Thus Laban is accused of disregarding the explicit legal provisions for such contingencies: cf. Exo. 22:13 (ABG, 247). "That which was torn of wild beasts through my neglect I made good of my own accord; but even where I could not be held responsible, you still demanded restitution" (SC, 185). V. 40—It is well known that in the East the cold by night corresponds to the heat by day: the hotter the day, the colder the night, as a rule. V. 42: "By the warning given to Laban, God pronounced sentence

upon the matter between Jacob and Laban, condemning the course which Laban had pursued, and still intended to pursue, towards Jacob; but not on that account sanctioning all that Jacob had done to increase his own possessions; still less confirming Jacob's assertion that the vision mentioned by Jacob (vers. 11, 12) was a revelation from God. But as Jacob had only met cunning with cunning; deceit with deceit, Laban had no right to punish him for what he had done. Some excuse may be found for Jacob's conduct in the heartless treatment he received from Laban; but the fact that God defended him from Laban's revenge did not prove it to be right. He had not acted upon the rule laid down in Prov. 20:22; cf. Rom. 12:17; 1 Thess. 5:15" (BCOTP, 299). *The Fear of Isaac*: that is, "the deity feared and worshiped by Isaac" (Skinner); "the Awesome One of Isaac" (Speiser; cf. 28:17); "the God of Isaac: Jacob avoided this latter designation because Isaac was still alive, although God had referred to Himself by that name (see 28:13)," as Jacob intended to say, "the merit of Isaac's fear of the Lord had stood me in good stead, and He has protected me as a reward" (SC, 185). "The God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the Dread of Isaac, proved to be mine" (Rotherham, EB, 63); "a term used for Israel's God, object of Isaac's reverence" (HSB, 52); "the God whom Isaac fears" (Murphy, MG, 406). "If the God of my father, the God of Abraham, the Kinsman of Isaac, etc.: a name for God that appears only here and in v. 53; Arabic and Palmyrene Aramaic justify this translation; hitherto the phrase has been rendered 'the fear of Isaac'" (JB, 53, n.)

(5) *Laban's response* (vv. 43, 44) has been variously interpreted, that is, as to motivation. "These words of Jacob's 'cut Laban to the heart with their truth, so that he turned round, offered his hand, and proposed a covenant'" (K-D, 299). "Neither receiving Jacob's torrent of invective with affected meekness, nor proving himself to

be completely reformed by the angry recriminations of his 'callous and hardened' son-in-law (Kalisch); but perhaps simply owning the truth of Jacob's words, and recognizing that he had no just ground of complaint (Calvin), as well as touched in his paternal affections by the sight of his daughters, from whom he felt he was about to part for ever . . . not as reminding Jacob that he had still a legal claim to his (Jacob's) wives and possessions, or at least possessions, though prepared to waive it, but rather as acknowledging that in doing injury to Jacob he would only be proceeding against his own flesh and blood" (Whitelaw, PCG, 384). "Laban maintains his right, but speedily adopts a more pathetic tone, leading to the pacific proposal of v. 44, *what last kindness can I do them* [his daughters]" (Skinner, ICCG, 399). "These two relatives, after having given utterance to their pent-up feelings, came at length to a mutual understanding. Laban was so cut by the severe and well-founded reproaches of Jacob, that he saw the necessity of an immediate surrender, or, rather, God influenced him to make reconciliation with his injured nephew, Prov. 16:7" (Jamieson, CECG, 212). Leupold has a different view: "Laban skillfully avoids the issue, which centers on the question whether Jacob has ever treated him unfairly, and substitutes another, namely, whether there is any likelihood of his avenging himself on Jacob and his family. In a rather grandiose fashion he claims all that Jacob has—household and cattle—is his own. The only use he makes of this strong claim is that, naturally, these being his own family, he would not harm them. It hardly seems that he has been 'cut to the quick' by the justice of Jacob's defense. He is merely bluffing through a contention in which he is being worsted. But being a suspicious character, he fears that Jacob might eventually do what he apparently would have done under like circumstances, namely, after arriving home and having grown strong, he may come with an armed band to avenge

all the wrongs of the past. To forestall this he suggests a 'covenant.' This covenant might serve to deter Jacob, of whose justice and fairness he is convinced, and who, Laban trusts, will keep a covenant inviolate" (EG, 852).

Again, however, we turn to the Nuzi records for what seems to be the most important aspect of this whole case, namely, the part played by the teraphim and the theft thereof. "The author handles the entire episode with outstanding skill. When he speaks of the figurines on his own (19, 34f.), he uses the secular, and sometimes irreverent term (teraphim, perhaps 'inert things'); but Laban refers to them as 'my gods' (v. 30). The search is suspensefully depicted, as Laban combs through one tent after another until he gets to the tent of Rachel, where they have been hidden. Rachel's pretense of female incapacitation is a literary gem in itself. The crowning touch of drama and irony is Jacob's total unawareness of the truth—the grim danger implicit in his innocent assurance that the guilty party would be put to death. But the basic significance of the incident now transcends all such considerations of human interest or literary presentation. It derives from underlying social practices as they bear on the nature of the patriarchal narratives in general. According to the Nuzi documents, which have been found to reflect time and again the social customs of Haran, possession of the house gods could signify legal title to a given estate, particularly in cases out of the ordinary, involving daughters, sons-in-law, or adopted sons. This peculiar practice of Rachel's homeland supplies at last the motive, sought so long but in vain, for her seemingly incomprehensible conduct. Rachel was in a position to know, or at least to suspect, that in conformance with local law her husband was entitled to a specified share in Laban's estate. But she also had ample reason to doubt that her father would voluntarily transfer the images as formal proof of property release; the ultimate status of

Laban's daughters and their maidservants could well have been involved as well. In other words, tradition remembered Rachel as a resolute woman who did not shrink from taking the law—or what she believed to be the law—into her own hands. The above technical detail would help to explain why Laban was more concerned about the disappearance of the images than about anything else (vs. 30). For under Hurrian law, Jacob's status in Laban's household would normally be tantamount to self-enslavement. That position, however, would be altered if Jacob was recognized as an adopted son who married the master's daughter. Possession of the house gods might well have made the difference. Laban knew that he did not have them, but chose to act as though he did, at least to save face. Thus his seeming magnanimity in the end (43f.) would no longer be out of character. He keeps up the pretense that he is the legal owner of everything in Jacob's possession; yet he must have been aware that, with the images gone, he could not press such a claim in a court of law" (Speiser, ABG, 250-251).

(6) *The Treaty* (vv. 45-55). "Two traditions appear to have been combined here: 1. A formal pact regulating the frontier between Laban and Jacob *i.e.*, between Aram and Israel, v. 52, together with an explanation of the name Gilead (Galed). 2. A private agreement concerning Laban's daughters, wives of Jacob, v. 50, together with an explanation of the name Mizpah, 'watch-post,' where a stele is erected. On the other hand it is possible that we have not here two traditions but simply explanations of the traditional composite name Mizpah of Gilead, 'watch-post of Gilead'; the place is known from Judg. 11:29 and lies south of the Jabbok in Transjordan" (JB, 53 n.). Laban proposed that they *cut* a covenant and let it be for a witness between them (v. 44). Jacob assented to the proposal at once, and the two proceeded to ratify the covenant. (7) *The Cairn of Witness*. "The way in which

this covenant was ratified was by a heap of stones being laid in a circular pile, to serve as seats, and in the center of this circle a large one was set up perpendicularly for an altar. It is probable that a sacrifice was first offered, and then that the feast of reconciliation was partaken of by both parties, seated on the stones around it (cf. v. 54). To this day heaps of stones, which have been used as memorials, are found abundantly in the region where this transaction took place" (CECG, 212). Jacob proceeded at once to furnish a practical proof of his assent to his father-in-law's proposal, by erecting a stone as a memorial and calling on his relatives also ('his brethren,' as in v. 23, by whom Laban and the kinsmen who came with him are indicated, as v. 54 shows) to gather stones into a heap, thus forming a table, as is briefly related in v. 46b, for the covenant meal (v. 54). This stone-heap (cairn) was called *Jegar-Sabadutha* by Laban, and *Galeed* by Jacob (v. 47). "*Jegar-sabadutha* is the exact Aramaic equivalent of *Galeed*, 'cairn of witness'" (JB, 53, n.): this incident, of course gave occasion to the name *Gilead*, the name applied to the mountainous region eastward of Argob (see Josephus, *Antiquities*, I, 19, 11). (It should be understood that the setting up of the stone-pillar by Jacob as a witness of the covenant about to be formed (v. 52) was a different transaction from the piling up of the stone-heap next referred to: cf. 28:18, Josh. 24:26-27). "Very strangely the critics, who are intent upon proving that two documents giving two recensions of the event are woven together, here hit upon the pillar or monolith, and the heap or cairn, and claim these two as one of the things that prove their point. Instead of pointing to a double recension or to two authors this merely points to the fact that Jacob was willing to go the limit to keep peace and harmony, as he had always been doing. The critics' argument is a *non sequitur*. All the rest of their so-called proof is of the same sort and

too flimsy to refute. V. 47. Here Moses inserts a notice to the effect that Laban and Jacob each gave a name to the cairn, and each man in his native tongue, that of Laban being Aramaic and that of Jacob Hebrew. Nothing indicates that this was a later insertion. Why might not Moses consider it a matter worthy of record that in Mesopotamia Aramaic prevailed, whereas in Canaan Hebrew, perhaps the ancient Canaanite language, was spoken? The exactness of his observation is established by this definite bit of historical information. The two names are not absolutely identical, as is usually claimed, though the difference is slight. *Jegar-sabadhutha* means 'heap of testimony,' *gal'ed* means 'heap of witness' or witnessing heap. For 'testimony' is an abstract noun, 'witness' is a personal noun or name of a person. We observe, therefore, that at the beginning of their history the nation Israel came of a stock that spoke Aramaic but abandoned the Aramaic for the Hebrew. After the Captivity the nation, strange to say, veered from Hebrew back to Aramaic" (EG, 853, 854).

(8) *The Purport of the Covenant*, vv. 50-52, was twofold: (1) Jacob swears that he will not maltreat Laban's daughters, nor even marry other wives besides these (*i.e.*, Leah and Rachel). "The stipulation against taking other wives is basic to many cuneiform marriage documents" (ABG, 248). Leupold thinks that "both these cases mentioned by Laban are in themselves harsh and unjust slanders." "Jacob had never given the least indication of being inclined to treat his wives harshly. Gentleness and goodness are characteristic of Jacob. Besides, as the account reads, Jacob had more wives already than he had ever desired. He apparently recognized the evils of bigamy sufficiently in his own home" (EG, 856). (2) Neither of the two was to pass the stone-heap and memorial-stone with a hostile intention towards the other. ("But they may pass over it for purposes of trade" (SC,

187). Note v. 52—The heap was Jacob's idea, now Laban appropriates what Jacob had proposed as if the entire transaction had been his very own. Moreover, Laban bound himself never to pass over the heap which he had erected as his witness, whereas Jacob was required to swear that he would never cross *the pillar and the pile*, both of which were witnesses on his part. (*Laban was undoubtedly even yet a very suspicious person*). "*That I will not pass over*. Here this covenant thought is purely negative, growing out of a suspicious nature, and securing a safeguard against mutual injuries; properly a theocratic separation" (Lange, 544). This treaty seems to have had even more extensive significance, however: as Morgenstern writes: "*Mizpah*, a secondary name for this heap of stones, meaning 'watchpost,' 'place of lookout.' Actually the district was called Gilead, while Mizpah (Mizpeh) was probably the name of the particular spot where the covenant was thought to have been made. It probably lay close to the boundary line between Syria and Gilead. It was the site of the covenant between Laban the Aramean and Jacob the Israelite by which the boundary line between the two peoples was fixed. Note the compact entered into between Syria and Israel, probably in Ahab's time; the hegemony of Israel in the affairs of the several little states of Western Asia seems to have been nominally acknowledged by Syria, 1 Ki., ch. 20" (JIBG, *in loco*). Concerning the location of the site of Gilead and Mizpah, it seems evident that we are not to understand this to be the mountain range to the south of the Jabbok, the present *Jebel Jelaad*, or *Jebel es Salt*. "The name *Gilead* has a much more comprehensive signification in the Old Testament; and the mountains to the south of the Jabbok are called in Deut. 3:12 the half of Mount Gilead; the mountains to the north of the Jabbok, the *Jebel-Ajlun*, forming the other half. In this chapter the name is used in the broader sense, and refers primarily to the northern half of the mountains

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(above the Jabbok); for Jacob did not cross the Jabbok till afterwards, 32:23-24" (K-D, 300). It is held by some that the words, "*and Mizpah, for he said,*" etc., are a later explanatory interpolation. "But there is not sufficient ground even for this, since Galeed and Mizpah are here identical in fact, both referring to the stone heap as well as to the pillar. Laban prays specifically to Jehovah, to watch that Jacob should not afflict his daughters; especially that he should not deprive them of their acquired rights, of being the ancestress of Jehovah's covenant people. From this hour, according to the prayer, Jehovah looks down from the heights of Gilead, as the representative of his rights, and watches that Jacob should keep his word to his daughters, even when across the Jordan. But now, as the name Gilead has its origin in some old sacred tradition, so has the name Mizpah also. It is not to be identified with the later cities bearing that name, with the Mizpah of Jephthah (Judg. 11:11, 34), or the Mizpah of Gilead (Judg. 11:29), or Ramoth-Mizpah (Josh. 13:26), but must be viewed as the family name which has spread itself through many daughters all over Canaan" (Lange, CDHCG, 544). (Note disagreement with K-D quoted above). "Laban, forewarned by God not to injure Jacob, made a covenant with his son-in-law; and a heap of stones was erected as a boundary between them, and called Galeed (*the heap of witness*) and Mizpah (*watch-tower*). As in later times, the fortress on these heights of Gilead became the frontier post of Israel against the Aramaic tribe that occupied Damascus, so now the same line of heights became the frontier between the nation in its youth and the older Aramaic tribe of Mesopotamia. As now, the confines of two Arab tribes are marked by the rude cairn or pile of stones erected at the boundary of their respective territories, so the pile of stones and the tower or pillar, erected by the two tribes of Jacob and Laban, marked that the natural limit of the range of

Gilead should be their natural limit also" (OTH, 102). (Cf. the various Mizpahs, or Mizpehs, mentioned in the O.T., e.g., Josh. 11:3, 15:38; Judg. 10:17, 20:1; 1 Sam. 22:3: it seems that the name might have been given to any high point.) Skinner's treatment of the Gilead geographical problem is based on the presupposition that the account embodies "*ethnographic reminiscences* in which Jacob and Laban were not private individuals, but represented Hebrews and Arameans respectively." He goes on to say: "The theory mostly favored by critical historians is that the Arameans are those of Damascus, and that the situation reflected is that of the Syrian wars which raged from c. 860 to c 770 B.C. Gunkel has, however, pointed out objections to this assumption; and has given strong reasons for believing that the narratives refer to an earlier date than 860. The story reads more like the record of a loose understanding between neighboring and on the whole friendly tribes, than of a formal treaty between two highly organized states like Israel and Damascus; and it exhibits no trace of the intense national animosity which was generated during the Syrian wars. In this connexion, Meyer's hypothesis that in the original tradition Laban represented the early unsettled nomads of the eastern desert acquires a new interest. Considering the tenacity with which such legends cling to a locality, there is no difficulty in supposing that in this case the tradition goes back to some prehistoric settlement of territorial claims between Hebrews and migratory Arameans" (ICCG, 403, 404). It should be noted here that the critical tendency so prevalent soon after the turn of the present century to interpret the outstanding personal names occurring in the patriarchal narratives as *tribal* rather than individual names has been all but abandoned in recent years. On the whole, this supposition (largely *a priori* on the part of the critics) has been pretty thoroughly "exploded" by archaeological discoveries. There is no longer any doubt

that the patriarchs were real historical personages. (The student who wishes to delve into the irreconcilable analysis of the early twentieth-century critics should make a study of the classic work on this subject, *The Unity of the Book of Genesis*, by William Henry Green, onetime Professor of Oriental and Old Testament Literature in Princeton Theological Seminary. This book, first published in 1895, is now out of print, of course. Hence it goes unnoticed and even unknown, either through ignorance or by design, in present-day theological seminaries. It may be procured, however, from secondhand book stores, or rescued from out-of-the-way places on the dusty shelves of these same seminary libraries.) We now close this phase of our subject with the following quotation from Leupold: "We have nothing certain as to the location of the heap called 'Galed' or 'Mizpah' in Mount Gilead. 'Mizpah' itself is a rather general term: there were many points of eminence in the land which could serve as 'watch-stations.' We personally do not believe that the Mizpah located in Jebel Ajlun is far enough to the north. We can only be sure of this, that according to chapter 32 it must have lain to the north of the River Jabbok" (EG, 859).

(9) *The Mizpah Benediction*, v. 49. "Mizpah (Mizpeh), 'watchtower,' . . . an unknown site in the N. highlands of the Jordan overlooking the Jabbok, where Jacob and Laban witnessed their covenant by erecting a cairn and pronouncing words now known as 'the Mizpah benediction,' Gen. 31:45-52" (HBD, 450). J. Vernon McGee (*Going Through Genesis*, 42) has an interesting comment on this point, as follows: "Verse 49 has been made into a benediction which many church groups use habitually. This is unfortunate for it does not have that sort of derivation. It actually is a truce between two crooks that each will no longer try to get the better of the other. The pile of stones at Mizpah was a boundary line between Laban and Jacob. Each promised not to cross over on the other's

side. In other words Jacob would work one side of the street and Laban would take the other. Each had but little confidence in the other. Surely the Mizpah benediction has been misplaced and misapplied." Certainly these statements deserve serious consideration.

(10) *The Covenant Oath*, v. 53. "Although Laban proposed to swear by *the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor*, the latter might include idols, so Jacob swore by *the Fear of his father Isaac*, viz., the true God" (SC, 187). On v. 49, "God is called as a witness so that if either Jacob or Laban breaks the agreement the LORD will enforce the covenant" (HSB, 53). V. 50—"no man is with us"—i.e., "no one but God only can be judge and witness between us, since we are to be so widely separated" (Lange, 544). Of the terms of the covenant "the memorial was to serve as a witness, and the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father (Terah), would be umpire between them. To this covenant, in which Laban, according to his polytheistic views, placed the God of Abraham upon the same level with the God of Nahor and Terah, Jacob swore by 'the Fear of Isaac' (v. 42), the God who was worshipped by his father with sacred awe" (K-D, 300). The verb *judge*, v. 53, is plural," either because Laban regarded the Elohim of Nahor as different from the Elohim of Abraham, or because, though acknowledging only one Elohim, he viewed him as maintaining several and distinct relations to the persons named. Laban here invokes his own hereditary Elohim, the Elohim of Abraham's father, to guard his rights and interests under the newly-formed covenant; while Jacob in his adjuration appeals to the Elohim of Abraham's son" (PCG, 387). "In conclusion Laban offers his most solemn adjuration, stronger than v. 50b; for God is called upon not only to 'witness' but to 'judge.' Besides, he is called by the solemn title, 'God of Abraham.' In fact, another god is invoked, 'the god of Nahor.' If v. 29 and v. 42 are

compared, it seems most likely that two different deities are under consideration: the true God, and Nahor's, that is also Laban's idol. The plural of the verb 'judge' therefore points to two different gods. So the polytheist Laban speaks. The more gods to help bind the pact, the better it is sealed, thinks Laban. Without directly correcting Laban or his statement of the case, Jacob swears by the true God under the same as that used in v. 42, the Fear (*i.e.*, the object of fear, or reverence) of his father Isaac. Had the renegade Laban perhaps meant to identify his own god with the true God of Abraham? And is Jacob's statement of His name an attempt to ward off such an identification? This is not impossible" (Leupold, EG, 857, 858). Skinner writes: "Whether a polytheistic differentiation of the two gods is attributed to Laban can hardly be determined." V. 52—"this *beap* be witness." "Objects of nature were frequently thus spoken of. But over and above there was a solemn appeal to God; and it is observable that there was a marked difference in the religious sentiments of the two. Laban spake of the God of Abraham and Nahor, their common ancestors; but Jacob, knowing that idolatry had crept into that branch of the family, swore by the Fear of Isaac. It is thought by many that Laban comprehended, under the peculiar phraseology that he employed, all the objects of worship in Terah's family, in Mesopotamia; and in that view we can discern a very intelligible reason for Jacob's omission of the name of Abraham, and swearing only by 'the Fear of his father Isaac,' who had never acknowledged any deity but 'the Lord.' They who have one God should have one heart; they who are agreed in religion should endeavor to agree in everything else" (Jamieson, CECG, 212). "The monotheism of Laban seems gliding into dualism; they may judge, or 'judge.' He corrects himself by adding the name of their common father, *i.e.*, Terah. From his alien and wavering point of view he seeks for sacredness in the

abundance of words. But Jacob swears simply and distinctly by the God whom Isaac feared, and whom even his father-in-law, Laban, should reverence and fear. Laban, indeed, also adheres to the communion with Jacob in his monotheism, and intimates that the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor designate two different religious directions from a common source or ground" (Lange, 544). "The erection of the pillar was a joint act of the two parties, in which Laban proposes, Jacob performs, and all take part. *The God of Abraham, Nahor, and Terah*. This is an interesting acknowledgement that their common ancestor Terah and his descendants down to Laban still acknowledged the true God, even in their idolatry. Jacob swears by the Fear of Isaac, perhaps to rid himself of any error that had crept into Laban's notions of God and his worship" (Murphy, MG, 407).

(11) *The Covenant of Reconciliation*, vv. 54-55, was now ratified by the common sacrifice and the common meal. Jacob "then offered sacrifices upon the mountain, and invited his relatives to eat, *i.e.*, to partake of a sacrificial meal, and seal the covenant by a feast of love" (K-D, 300). "We view Jacob's sacrifice as one of thanksgiving that this last serious danger that threatened from Laban is removed. We cannot conceive of Jacob as joining with the idolater Laban in worship and sacrifice. Consequently, we hesitate to identify 'the eating of bread' with the partaking of the sacrificial feast, unless the 'kinsmen' here are to be regarded only as the men on Jacob's side. . . . In that event the kinsmen are to be thought of as having the same mind as Jacob on questions of religious practices. But the summons to eat bread might also signalize that the transactions between Jacob and Laban are concluded. The events may well have consumed an entire day, and so the night had to be spent in the same place" (Leupold, EG, 858). According to Rashi, Jacob slaughtered animals

for the feast; however, Rashi "apparently insists that it was not a sacrificial meal" (SC, 187). Whitelaw holds that "brethren" here referred to "Laban's followers, who may have withdrawn to a distance during the interview," and hence had to be "called to eat bread" (PCG, 887). The sacrificial meal later became an integral part of the Hebrew ritual (cf. Exo. 24:3-8, 29:27-28; Lev. 10:14-15). "At all events, the covenant-meal forms a thorough and final conciliation. Laban's reverence for the God of his fathers, and his love for his daughters and grandsons, present him once more in the most favorable aspect of his character, and thus we take our leave of him. We must notice, however, that before the entrance of Jacob he had made little progress in his business. Close, narrow-hearted views, are as really the cause of the curse, as its fruits" (Lange, 545). The following morning Laban and his retinue departed and returned "to his place," that is, Paddan-aram (28:2).

The following summarization of this section, by Cornfeld (AtD, 87-88), is excellent: "Laban pursued Jacob for seven days and caught up with him in the highlands of Gilead, east of Jordan. What troubled him more than the loss of his daughters, their husband and livestock, was the loss of the teraphim. He demanded indignantly, 'But why did you steal my gods?' As Rachel was unwell, religious custom prevented her father from forcing her off the saddle, and the theft remained unexposed. Laban and Jacob apparently agreed to maintain an amicable relationship on the basis of a new covenant. They exchanged blessings, made the covenant and set up a cairn and pillar ('matzeba') as a witness to their sincerity; the inanimate object was naively thought to 'oversee' the covenant. They swore that neither would transgress the boundary to harm the other. This patriarchal clan covenant seems to reflect either a remote separation of the clans, or the story

may serve to justify territorial status of later times, when the Israelite and Aramean peoples upheld a treaty of amity and marked the boundary between them. . . . They invoked their respective ancestral gods to judge between them: 'The God of Abraham' and 'The God of Nahor.' Jacob also swore by a special epithet of God: the 'Fear of his father Isaac' (meaning, according to the interpretation, 'The Kinsman of Isaac'). This devotion to the God of one's father is one of the features of patriarchal religion that stemmed from the pre-Hebraic Semitic past. . . . An especially impressive conclusion of the compact was the animal sacrifice offered, and a meal at which the solemn covenant act was performed: to 'cut a covenant' (the rite of sacrifice) and to 'eat bread' remained a familiar idiom of Israelite religious symbols. In eating and drinking, life is perfectly symbolized, and gains profound religious connotation. This is the root of the Jewish and Christian practice of grace before meals, for eating is the epitome of man's dependence upon God and other men. The central ceremonies of Judaism, such as the Passover, and the Eucharist of Christianity, are reminiscent of such very ancient Hebrew cultic practices. The covenant between Jacob and Laban was of course a parity treaty made between equals, unlike the covenants between God as Lord and the Patriarchs, His servants." Thus we can readily grasp the idea of the relation of the eating of the bread and the drinking of the fruit of the vine of the Lord's Supper to the spiritual life of the participant. Through the ministry of thanksgiving, commemoration, meditation, and prayer, the Christian does actually—and not in any magical way, either—effect the deepening of his spiritual life (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16-21, 11:20-30; Matt. 26:26-29).

Concerning the alleged "sources" of the account of the Covenant of Gilead, we suggest the following: "There can be no doubt that vers. 49 and 50 bear the marks of a

subsequent insertion. But there is nothing in the nature of his interpolation to indicate a compilation of the history from different sources. That Laban, when making this covenant, should have spoken of the future treatment of his daughters, is a thing so natural, that there would have been something strange in the omission. And it is not less suitable to the circumstances, that he calls upon the God of Jacob, *i.e.*, Jehovah, to watch in this affair [v. 49]. And apart from the use of the name *Jehovah*, which is perfectly suitable here, there is nothing whatever to point to a different source; to say nothing of the fact that the critics themselves cannot agree as to the nature of the source supposed" (K-D, 300, n.).

Stones were used for different purposes in ancient times. (1) Large stones were set up as memorials, that is, to commemorate some especially significant event (Gen. 28:18, 31:45, 35:14; Josh. 4:9; 1 Sam 7:12). Such stones were usually consecrated by anointing with oil (Gen. 28:18). A similar practice existed in heathen countries, and "by a singular coincidence these stones were described in Phoenicia by a name very similar to Beth-el, *viz.*, *baetylia*. The only point of resemblance between the two consists in the custom of anointing" (UBD, 1047). (2) Heaps of stones were piled up on various occasions; *e.g.*, the making of a treaty (Gen. 31:46), or over the grave of a notorious offender (Josh. 7:26, 8:29; 2 Sam. 18:17); such heaps often attained a great size from the custom of each passer-by's adding a stone. (3) "That the worship of stones prevailed among the heathen nations surrounding Palestine, and was from them borrowed by apostate Israelites, appears from Isa. 57:6 (comp. Lev. 26:1). 'The smooth stones of the stream' are those which the stream has washed smooth with time, and rounded into a pleasing shape. 'In Carthage such stones were called *abbadires*; and among the ancient Arabs the *asnam*, or idols, consisted

for the most part of rude blocks of stone of this description. . . . Stone worship of this kind had been practiced by the Israelites before the Captivity, and their heathenish practices had been transmitted to the exiles in Babylon' (Delitzsch, *Com.* in loc.)' (UBD, 1047). The notion expressed above that the pillar (*matzeba*) was *per se* naively thought to "oversee" the covenant (v. 52) in Gilead is surely proved erroneous by the fact that the true God and other ancestral gods were immediately invoked to do this witnessing (v. 53). We can see no reason for assuming animism or personification in this incident.

Hurrian evidences. We have already made note of different details of the transactions between Jacob and Laban which reflect details of Hurrian law. There are many instances of such correspondences. The following is a summary of many of these. "Hurrian customs are particularly in evidence in the record of Jacob.—29:18-19, gaining a wife in return for service: in Nuzu a man became a slave to gain a slave wife, though Jacob was no slave, v. 15—31:15, Laban's daughters objected to being 'reckoned as foreign women,' for native women had a higher standing.—31:38—cf. how in Nuzu shepherds were tried for illegally slaughtering the sheep. Particularly, Jacob's whole relation to Laban suggests a Hurrian 'adoption' contract: 29:18, Jacob got daughters in return for work, becoming a 'son'; 31:50, he was to marry no other wives, as in Nuzu adoptions; 31:43, Laban had a claim over Jacob's children, though God intervened to abrogate the custom, v. 24; 31:1, Laban's sons were worried about heirship, while v. 31, Jacob claimed his wages were changed, perhaps a problem of heirs born after Jacob's adoption, who were supposed to receive their percentage; and 31:15, Rachel stole the teraphim (household idols, 31:30, cf. 1 Sam. 19:13, Zech. 10:2, though she served God too, 30:24, and Jacob knew nothing of them, 31:32, and opposed

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idolatry, 35:2), which in Nuzu meant a legal claim on the property and which Laban was justified in demanding back for his own sons, 31:30. Knowledge of such Hurrian parallels is valuable to explain (though not necessarily excuse) the patriarchal actions, and to confirm the accuracy of the Biblical records" (OHH, 45).

Here the first phase of Jacob's return to the land of his father comes to an end. Early in the morning of the day which followed the establishing of the Covenant in Gilead, Laban, after kissing his daughters' sons and the daughters themselves, and blessing them (cf. 24:60, 28:1), set out on his journey "unto his place," that is, his home, Paddan-aram (cf. 18:33, 30:25), and Jacob with his household went on his way to *his* home, Beersheba. (It is interesting to note that apparently Laban did not kiss Jacob on taking final leave of him as he did on first meeting him, cf. 29:13).

2. *Jacob's Reconciliation with Esau: The Biblical Account (32:1—33:17)*

1 And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. 2 And Jacob said when he saw them, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

3 And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the field of Edom. 4 And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye say unto my lord Esau: Thus saith thy servant Jacob, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now: 5 and I have oxen, and asses, and flocks, and men-servants, and maid-servants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in thy sight. 6 And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and moreover he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him. 7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and was distressed: and he divided the

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people that were with him, and the flocks, and the herds, and the camels, into two companies; 8 and he said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the company which is left shall escape. 9 And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, O Jehovah, who saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will do thee good: 10 I am not worthy of the least of all the lovingkindnesses, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two companies. 11 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, the mother with the children. 12 And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.

13 And he lodged there that night, and took of that which he had with him a present for Esau his brother: 14 two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, 15 thirty milch camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty she-asses and ten foals. 16 And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove. 17 And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, Whose art thou? and whither goest thou? and whose are these before thee? 18 then thou shalt say, They are thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau: and, behold, he also is behind us. 19 And he commanded also the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him; 20 and ye shall say, Moreover, behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and

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afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept me. 21 So the present passed over before him: and he himself lodged that night in the company.

22 And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two handmaids, and his eleven children, and passed over the ford of the Jabbok. 23 And he took them, and sent them over the stream, and sent over that which he had. 24 And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. 25 And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was strained, as he wrestled with him. 26 And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. 27 And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. 28 And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for thou hast striven with God and with men, and hast prevailed. 29 And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. 30 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for, said he, I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. 31 And the sun rose upon him as he passed over Peniel, and he limped upon his thigh. 32 Therefore the children of Israel eat not the sinew of the hip which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip.

1 And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau was coming, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids. 2 And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost. 3 And he himself passed over before them, and bowed himself to

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the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. 4 And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept. 5 And he lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and said, Who are these with thee? And he said, The children whom God hath graciously given thy servant. 6 Then the handmaids came near, they and their children, and they bowed themselves. 7 And Leah also and her children came near, and bowed themselves: and after came Joseph near and Rachel, and they bowed themselves. 8 and he said, What meanest thou by all this company which I met? And he said, To find favor in the sight of my lord. 9 And Esau said, I have enough, my brother; let that which thou hast be thine. 10 And Jacob said, Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found favor in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand; forasmuch as I have seen thy face as one seeth the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me, 11 Take, I pray thee, my gift that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough. And he urged him, and he took it. 12 And he said, Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before thee. 13 And he said unto him, My lord knoweth that the children are tender, and that the flocks and herds with me have their young: and if they overdrive them one day, all the flocks will die. 14 Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant: and I will lead on gently, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come unto my lord unto Seir. 15 And Esau said, Let me now leave with thee some of the folk that are with me. And he said, What needeth it? let me find favor in the sight of my lord. 16 So Esau returned that day on his way unto Seir. 17 And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him a house, and made booths for his cattle: therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

(1) *Jacob's experience at Mahanaim, 32:1-2.* As Jacob went on his way from Gilead and Mizpah in a southerly direction, the *angels of God*, literally, *messengers of Elohim* (not chance travelers who informed him of Esau's presence in the vicinity, but angels) met him (cf. Heb. 1:7, 14; Psalms. 104:4), not necessarily coming in an opposite direction, but simply falling in with him as he journeyed. "Whether this was a waking vision or a midnight dream is uncertain, though the two former visions enjoyed by Jacob were at night (28:12, 31:10)" (PCG, 389). "The elevated state and feeling of Jacob, after the departure of Laban, reveals itself in the vision of the hosts of God. Heaven is not merely connected with the saints on the earth (through the ladder); its hosts are warlike hosts, who invisibly guard the saints and defend them, even while upon the earth. Here is the very germ and source of the designation of God as the God of hosts, Zabaoth" (Lange, 545). (Cf. Isa. 1:9, Rom. 9:29). "The appearance of the invisible host may have been designed to celebrate Jacob's triumph over Laban, as after Christ's victory over Satan in the wilderness angels came and ministered unto him (Matt. 4:11), or to remind him that he owed his deliverance to Divine interposition, but was probably intended to assure him of protection in his approaching interview with Esau, and perhaps also to give him welcome in returning home again to Canaan, if not in addition to suggest that his descendants would require to fight for their inheritance" (PCG, 389). "*Met him*, lit., came, drew near to him, not precisely that they came from an opposite direction. This vision does not relate primarily to the approaching meeting with Esau (Peniel relates to this), but to the dangerous meeting with Laban. As the Angel of God had disclosed to him in vision the divine assistance against his unjust sufferings in Mesopotamia, so now he enjoys a revelation of the protection which God had prepared for

him upon Mount Gilead, through his angels (cf. 2 Ki. 6:17). In this sense he well calls the angels 'God's host,' and the place in which they met him, *double camp*. By the side of the visible camp, which he, with Laban and his retainers, had made, God had prepared another, an invisible camp, for his protection. It served also to encourage him, in a general way, for the approaching meeting with Esau" (Lange, 544).

"Jacob was now receiving divine encouragement to meet the new dangers of the land he was entering. His eyes were opened to see a troop of angels, 'the host of God' sent for his protection, and forming a second camp beside his own; and he called the name of the place *Mahanaïm* (*the two camps* or *hosts*)" (OTH, 102). "How often we meet this mention of angels in the story of Jacob's life! Angels on the ladder in the vision at Bethel; the dream of an angel that told him to leave the country of Laban; angels now before him on his way; the memory of an angel at the last when he laid his hands upon the sons of Joseph, and said, 'The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads' (48:16). There had been much earthliness and evil in Jacob, and certainly it was too bold a phrase to say that he had been redeemed from all of it. But the striking fact is the repeated association of angels with the name of this imperfect man. The one great characteristic which gradually refined him was his desire—which from the beginning he possessed—for nearer knowledge of God. May it be therefore that the angels of God come, even though in invisible presence, to every man who has that saving eagerness? Not only in the case of Jacob, but in that of many another, those who look at the man's life and what is happening in it and around it may be able to say that as he went on his way the angels of God met him" (IBG, 719).

"It is not said whether this angelic manifestation was made in a vision by day, or a dream by night. It was most probably the former—an internal occurrence, a mental spectacle, analogous, as in many similar cases (cf. 15:1, 5, 12; 21:12, 13, 17; 22:2, 3), to the dream which he had on his journey to Mesopotamia. For there is an evident allusion to the appearance upon the ladder (28:12); and this occurring to Jacob in his return to Canaan, was an encouraging pledge of the continued presence and protection of God: Psa. 34:7, Heb. 1:14" (Jamieson, 213). *Mahanaim*, that is, "*two hosts or camps*." "Two myriads is the number usually employed to denote an indefinite number; but here it must have reference to the two hosts, God's host of angels and Jacob's own camp. The place was situated between Mount Gilead and the Jabbok, near the banks of that brook. A town afterwards rose upon the spot, on the border of the tribal territories of Gad and Manasseh, supposed by *Porter* to be identified in a ruin called Mahneh" (Jamieson, *ibid.*). "When Laban had taken his departure peaceably, Jacob pursued his journey to Canaan. He was then met by some angels of God; and he called the place where they appeared *Mahanaim*, i.e., double camp or double host, because the host of God joined his host as a safeguard. This appearance of angels necessarily reminded him of the vision of the ladder, on his flight from Canaan. Just as the angels ascending and descending had then represented to him the divine protection and assistance during his journey and sojourn in a foreign land, so now the angelic host was a signal of the help of God for the approaching conflict with Esau of which he was in fear, and a fresh pledge of the promise (ch. 28:15), 'I will bring thee back to the land,' etc. Jacob saw it during his journey; in a waking condition, therefore, not internally, but out of or above himself: but whether with the eyes of the body or of the mind (cf. 2 Ki. 6:17), cannot be de-

terminated. *Mahanaim* was afterwards a distinguished city, which is frequently mentioned, situated to the north of the Jabbok; and the name and remains are still preserved in the place called Mahneh (*Robinson*, Pal. Appendix, p. 166), the site of which, however, has not yet been minutely examined" (K-D, 301). For other references to Mahanaim, see Josh. 13:26, 30; Josh. 21:38, 1 Chron. 6:80; 2 Sam. 2:8, 12; 2 Sam. 4:5-8; 2 Sam. 17:24, 27; 1 Ki. 2:8, 4:14). Leupold writes: "Though Mahanaim is repeatedly mentioned in the Scriptures, we cannot be sure of its exact location. It must have lain somewhere east of Jordan near the confluence of the Jordan and the Jabbok. The present site *Machneh* often mentioned in this connection seems too far to the north" (EG, 862).

(2) *Preparations for meeting Esau*, vv. 3-23. Having achieved reconciliation with Laban, Jacob now finds his old fears returning—those fears that sent him away from home in the first place. "This long passage is a vivid picture of a man who could not get away from the consequences of an old wrong. Many years before, Jacob had defrauded Esau. He had got away to a safe distance and he had stayed there a long time. Doubtless he had tried to forget about Esau, or at any rate to act as if Esau's oath to be avenged could be forgotten. While in Laban's country he could feel comfortable. But the time had come when he wanted to go back home; and though the thought of it drew him, it appalled him too. There was the nostalgia of early memories, but there was the nightmare of the later one, and it overshadowed all the rest. Esau was there; and what would Esau do? As a matter of fact, Esau would not do anything. If he had not forgotten what Jacob had done to him, he had stopped bothering about it. Hot-tempered and terrifying though he could be, he was too casual to carry a grudge. As ch. 33 tells, he would meet Jacob presently with the

bluff generosity of the big man who lets bygones be bygones. But not only did Jacob not know that; what he supposed he knew was the exact opposite. Esau would confront him as a deadly threat" (Bowie, IBG, 719). "Thus conscience doth makes cowards of us all" (Hamlet's Soliloquy). "Jacob had passed through a humiliating process. He had been thoroughly afraid, and this was the more galling because he thought of himself as somebody who ought not to have had to be afraid. In his possessions he was a person of consequence. He had tried to suggest that to Esau in his first messages. But none of his possessions fortified him when his conscience let him down. Even when Esau met him with such magnanimity, Jacob was not yet at ease. He still kept on his guard, with unhappy apprehension lest Esau might change his mind (see 33:12-17). Knowing that he had not deserved Esau's brotherliness, he could not believe that he could trust it. The barrier in the way of forgiveness may lie not in the unreadiness of the wronged to give, but in the inability of the one who has done wrong to receive. Jacob had to be humbled and chastened before he could be made clean. The wrestling by the Jabbok would be the beginning of that. He had to admit down deep that he did not deserve anything, and he had to get rid of the pride that thought he could work out his peace by his own wits. Only so could he ever feel that the relationship with Esau had really been restored. More importantly, it is only so that men can believe in and accept the forgiveness of the love of God" (IBG, *ibid.*) (The expository matter in IBG is superb in the delineation of human character, its foibles, its strengths and its weaknesses. Although the exegesis of this set of books follows closely the speculations of the critics, nevertheless the set is well worth having in one's library for the expository treatment which deals graphically with what might be termed the "human interest" narratives of the Bible. From this point

of view, the content of the book of Genesis is superbly presented.—C.C.),

In this connection, we have some information of great value from Jewish sources, as follows: Laban has departed—now Jacob can breathe freely. But he is far from happy contemplating Esau's natural and justifiable desire for vengeance. He now realizes the enormity of the wrong he has done his brother. That was twenty years ago: maybe Esau's anger had cooled a bit. He did not fear the angel, but he feared his brother because he had done him a great wrong. Why expect Esau to act differently? He, Jacob, had countered Laban's deceit with deceit of his own. Why would not Esau do the same? Jacob was getting some of his own medicine. As the rabbis say: "Before a man sins, everyone fears him; after he sins, he fears everyone." In prosperity we forget God. But when distress and danger confront us we turn to God. All earthly help seems futile. "God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble" (Psa. 46:1). So Jacob prayed. But instead of relying on God to whom he prayed, he resorted to his old tricks, cunning plans for his defense. He trusted God only half way. "If God will save me from this peril, well and good; but if not, I must spare no effort to save myself." Halfway faith is no faith at all. Then followed an anxious night. Redoubled preparations were made to meet Esau the next morning. Jacob sent his wives and children across the stream hoping their helplessness might touch Esau's heart. Jacob remained on this side of the stream. He would cross only at the last moment; possibly he would turn back and flee, without sheep and cattle, wives and children, to hinder his escape. But there was no place for him to go. Such was Jacob's guilt-laden mind (Morgens-tern, JIBG). "This episode is narrated to illustrate how God saved his servant and redeemed him from an enemy stronger than himself, by sending His angel and delivering

him. We also learn that Jacob did not rely upon his righteousness, but took all measures to meet the situation. It contains the further lesson that whatever happened to the patriarchs happens to their offspring, and we should follow his example by making a threefold preparation in our fight against Esau's descendants, viz., prayer, gifts (appeasement) and war (Nachmanides)" (SC, 195).

The matter of the next few verses occasions some differences of view on the part of Jewish commentators. As Isaac lived in the southern part of Canaan, Jacob had to pass through or by Edom. Realizing that he was now approaching Esau's domain, *the land of Seir, the field of Edom*, he took certain precautionary measures for protection. (The land of Seir was the region originally occupied by the Horites [Gen. 14:6, 36:21-30; Ezek. 35:2ff.], which was taken over later by Esau and his descendants [Deut. 2:1-29; Num. 20:14-21; Gen. 32:3, 36:8, 36:20ff.; Num. 20:14-21; Josh. 24:4; 2 Chron. 20:10, etc.], and then became known as Edom. This was the mountainous region lying south and east of the Dead Sea. "The statement that Esau was already in the land of Seir [v. 4], or, as it is afterwards called, the field of Edom, is not at variance with chapter 36:6, and may be very naturally explained on the supposition, that with the increase of his family and possessions, he severed himself more and more from his father's house, becoming increasingly convinced, as time went on, that he could hope for no change in the blessings pronounced by his father upon Jacob and himself, which excluded him from the inheritance of the promise, viz. the future possession of Canaan. Now, even if his malicious feelings toward Jacob had gradually softened down, he had probably never said anything to his parents on the subject, so that Rebekah had been unable to fulfil her promise [27:45])" (K-D, 302). And what about Jacob? Rebekah had not communicated with him either, as she had promised to do as

soon as his brother's anger had subsided. He had no indication that Esau's intentions were anything but hostile. What was he to do but make an effort to placate this brother whom he had not heard from for more than twenty years? Obviously, some sort of a delegation was in order, a delegation acknowledging Esau as one entitled to receive reports about one who is about to enter the land: such a delegation might produce a kindlier feeling on the part of the man thus honored. Jacob's first objective was to conciliate Esau, if possible. To this end he sent messengers ahead to make contact with him and to make known his return, in such a style of humility ("my Lord Esau," "thy servant Jacob") as was adapted to conciliate his brother. As a matter of fact Jacob's language was really that of great servility, dictated of course by his fear of his brother's vengeance. He makes no secret where he has been; he had been with Laban. He indicates further that his stay in the land of the east had been temporary: that he had stayed there only as a stranger or pilgrim; that indeed he had only *sojourned* with Laban (v. 4) and was now on his way back home. Nor, he made it clear, should Esau get the impression that Jacob was an impecunious beggar dependent on Esau's charity coming back as a suppliant: on the contrary, he was coming with oxen, and asses, and flocks, and men-servants and maid-servants, etc. No wonder he was thrown into the greatest alarm and anxiety when the messengers returned to tell him that Esau was coming to meet him with a force of four hundred men. Note v. 6, the report of the messengers: "We came to thy brother Esau"—according to Rashi, "to him whom you regard as a *brother*, but he is *Esau*; he is advancing to attack you" (SC, 196). "Sforno agrees with Rashi's preceding comment: he is coming with four hundred men to attack you. Rashbam interprets: you have found favor in his sight, and in your honour he is coming to meet you with a large retinue"

(SC, 196). The obvious reason for Esau's "army" seems to have been, rather, that *he was just then engaged in subjugating the Horite people in Seir*, a fact which would fully explain Gen. 36:6, and thus refute the critical assumption of different source materials. "The simplest explanation of the fact that Esau should have had so many men about him as a standing army, is that given by *Delitzsch*; namely, that he had to subjugate the Horite population in Seir, for which purpose he might easily have formed such an army, partly from the Canaanitish and Ishmaelitish relatives of his wives, and partly from his own servants. His reason for going to meet Jacob with such a company may have been, either to show how mighty a prince he was, or with the intention of making his brother sensible of his superior power, and assuming a hostile attitude if the circumstances favored it, even though the lapse of years had so far mitigated his anger, that he no longer thought of executing the vengeance he had threatened twenty years before. For we are warranted in regarding Jacob's fear as no vain, subjective fancy, but as having an objective foundation, by the fact that God endowed him with courage and strength for his meeting with Esau, through the medium of the angelic host and the wrestling at the Jabbok; whilst, on the other hand, the brotherly affection and openness with which Esau met him, are to be attributed partly to Jacob's humble demeanor, and still more to the fact, that by the influence of God, the still remaining malice had been rooted out from his heart" (K-D, 302). "Here again, in the interest of tracing down sources more or less out of harmony with one another, critics assert that these verses (3-5) assume Isaac's death and Esau's occupation of the land which he in reality only took in hand somewhat later, according to 36:6, which is ascribed to P. Isaac, with his non-aggressive temperament, may have allowed the far more active Esau to take the disposition of matters in hand. So Jacob may

well have been justified in dealing with Esau as 'master.' This is all quite plausible even if Isaac had not died. Furthermore, in speaking of 'the land of Seir, the region of Edom,' Jacob may only imply that Esau had begun to take possession of the land which was afterward to become his and of whose definite and final occupation 36:6 speaks. In any case, 'master,' used in reference to Esau, only describes Jacob's conception of their new relation. Jacob did not enter into negotiations with Isaac, his father, in approaching the land. His welcome was assured at his father's hand. But the previous misunderstanding called for an adjustment with Esau. At the same time our explanation accounts for Esau's 400 men: they are an army that he has gathered while engaged upon his task of subduing Seir, the old domain of the Horites (cf. 14:6). Skinner's further objection: 'how he was ready to strike so far north of his territory is a difficulty,' is thus also disposed of" (Leupold, EG, 863-864).

A number of questions obtrude themselves at this point. *E.g.*, Why was Esau in that territory in the first place? And why was he there in such force, if he was not engaged in dispossessing the occupants? Why would he be that far north, if conquest was not his design? How would he know that he would be meeting up with Jacob? Did Jacob expect to find him there, or somewhere back in the vicinity of Canaan? Had the angelic host (v. 2) informed him of Esau's nearness? Is there any evidence from any quarter that Jacob had received any news from home during the entire twenty years he had been in Paddan-aram? What did the messengers mean when they returned and said to Jacob, "We came to thy brother Esau?" Did they not mean that they had *come upon* Esau and his contingent unexpectedly, that is, sooner than they had thought to do so? "Esau seems to have been about as uncertain in his own mind as to his plans and purposes as Jacob was in reference to these same plans

and purposes? Certainly Esau must have been surprised when Jacob's messengers met him? And certainly the very *uncertainties* implicit in the report of Jacob's messengers made it all the more alarming to Jacob. In substance, the message which Jacob's emissaries took to Esau was "nothing but an announcement of his arrival and his great wealth (33:12ff.). The shepherd, with all his success, is at the mercy of the fierce marauder who was to 'live by his sword,' 27:40" (ICCG, 406). At the news brought back by his messengers *fear* overwhelmed Jacob, even though every crisis in the past had terminated in his advantage. But now he was at the point of no return, facing the most critical experience of all in the fact that the word brought back about Esau and his force of 400 men indicated the worst. Dividing all his possessions at the River Jabbok, so that if Esau should attack one part, the other might have a chance to get away, Jacob made ready for the anticipated confrontation in a threefold manner, first by prayer, then by gifts, and finally by actual combat if necessary.

The Prayer, vv. 9-12. "Jacob was naturally timid; but his conscience told him that there was much ground for apprehension; and his distress was all the more aggravated that he had to provide for the safety of a large and helpless family. In this great emergency *he had recourse to prayer*" (CECG, 213). "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." (Unfortunately a great many people can pray like a bishop in a thunderstorm, who never think of God at any other time: in the lines of the well-known bit of satirical humor:

God and the doctor we alike adore,
Just on the brink of danger, not before;
The danger past, both are unrequited—
God is forgotten, and the doctor slighted.)

Nevertheless, Jacob did the only thing he could do under the circumstances—he prayed, to the God of his fathers Abraham and Isaac, the living and true God. (Not even the slightest smack of idolatry or polytheism in this prayer!) “This is the first recorded example of prayer in the Bible. It is short, earnest and bearing directly on the occasion. The appeal is made to God, as standing in a covenant relation to his family, just as we ought to put our hopes of acceptance with God in Christ; for Jacob uses here the name *Jehovah*, along with other titles, in the invocation, as he invokes it singly elsewhere (cf. 49:18). He pleads the special promise made to himself of a safe return; and after a most humble and affecting confession of unworthiness, breathes an earnest desire for deliverance from the impending danger. It was the prayer of a kind husband, an affectionate father, a firm believer in the promises” (Jamieson, CECG, 213-214). “This prayer strikes a religious note surprising in this purely factual context” (JB, 53). “Jacob’s prayer, consisting of an invocation (10), thanksgiving (11), petition (12), and appeal to the divine faithfulness (13) is a classical model of OT devotion” (Skinner, ICCG, 406). Skinner adds: “though the element of confession, so prominent in later supplications, is significantly absent.” (Leupold discusses this last assertion as follows: “It is hard to understand how men can claim that ‘the element of confession is significantly absent’ in Jacob’s prayer. True, a specific confession of sin is not made in these words. But what does, ‘I am unworthy,’ imply? Why is he unworthy? There is only one thing that renders us unworthy of God’s mercies and that is our sin. Must this simple piece of insight be denied Jacob? It is so elementary in itself as to be among the rudiments of spiritual insight. Let men also remember that lengthy confessions of sin may be made where there is no sense of repentance whatsoever. And again, men may be most sincerely penitent and yet may

say little about their sin. If ever a prayer implied a deep sense of guilt it is Jacob's. Behind the critics' claim that 'confession is absent' from this prayer lies the purpose to thrust an evolutionistic development into religious experiences, a development which is 'significantly absent.' It was not first 'in later supplications' that this element became 'so prominent.' It was just that in this earlier age the experience of sin and guilt particularly impressed God's saints as rendering them unworthy of God's mercies (cf. also 18:27 in Abraham's case)" (EG, 867). One might well compare also the case of the publican (Luke 18:13-14) or that of the prodigal son (Luke 15:18-24). Did not Jesus commend both of these 'supplications'? We see no reason for assuming that God must hear us "call the roll" of our sins, specifying each in its proper order, to have mercy on us? Cf. Jas. 2:10—Sin is lawlessness, and a single instance of sin makes one guilty of it (cf. 1 John 3:4). (Cf. John 1:29—note the singular here, "sin."). *Surely the very profession of unworthiness is confession of sin.* Human authority has established the custom of enumerating specific sins—in the priestly confessional, of course: whether such an enumeration ever gets as high as the Throne of Grace is indeed a moot question. "Jacob's humble prayer in a crisis of his life, his own comparison of his former status with the present, harmonizes the inner religious theme of the story with the other theme of his experience. This man who understood the consequences of his actions (flight from his father's house, danger of dependence, trouble with his children), is still a man whom the grace of God had found. So tradition dwells on his many trials of faith, while describing him as a man to whom the election of God came without full merit on his part" (Cornfeld, AtD, 89. Note especially v. 10, "*this Jordan.*" Is the Jordan here, instead of the Jabbok, v. 22, "a later elaboration"? (as JB would have it, p. 53). "The Jabbok was situated near,

indeed is a tributary of the Jordan" (PCG, 390). The mention of the Jordan here certainly had reference to Jacob's *first* crossing, that is, on his way to Paddan-aram: at that time he had only his staff; now he has abundant wealth in the form of sheep, goats, camels, and cows and bulls (vv. 14, 15). "The measure of these gracious gifts at God's hands is best illustrated by the contrast between what Jacob was when he first crossed the Jordan and what he now has upon his return to Jordan" (EG, 867). Naturally he would think of the Jordan as the dividing line between his homeland and the country to which he had journeyed; on the first trek he was all alone, with nothing but his staff. "With this staff," means, as Luther translates, "with only this *staff*" (cf. EG, *ibid.*).

Note that Jacob closed his petition with a specific request that the God of his fathers deliver him, as the "mother with the children," from Esau's vengeance, "a proverbial expression for unsparing cruelty, or complete extirpation, taken from the idea of destroying a bird while sitting upon its young" (cf. Deut. 22:6, Hos. 10:14). He then pleads the Divine promises at Bethel (28:13-15) and at Haran (31:3), as an argument why Jehovah should now extend to him protection against Esau. Or, "by killing the mother he will smite me, even if I personally escape" (SC, 197). Some (e.g., Tuch) have criticized this aspect of the prayer as "somewhat inaptly reminding God of His commands and promises, and calling upon Him to keep His word." But is not this precisely what God expects His people to do? (Cf. Isa. 43:26). "According to Scripture the Divine promise is always the petitioner's best warrant" (PCG, 391). (Cf. "thy seed as the sand of the sea" with "the dust of the earth," 13:16, "the stars of heaven," 15:5, and as "the sand upon the sea-shore," 22:17, "which cannot be numbered for multitude."). "Thus Jacob changes the imagery of the Abrahamic Promise, ch. 22:17. Such a destructive attack as now

threatens him, would oppose and defeat the divine promise. Faith clings to the promise, and is thus developed" (Lange, 549). "The objection that it is unbecoming in Jacob to remind God of His promise, shows an utter misconception of true prayer, which presupposes the promise of God just as truly as it implies the consciousness of wants. Faith, which is the life of prayer, clings to the divine promises, and pleads them" (Gosman, *ibid.*, 549). "Jacob, fearing the worst, divided his people and flocks into two camps, that if Esau smote the one, the other might escape. He then turned to the Great Helper in every time of need, and with an earnest prayer besought the God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac, who had directed him to return, that, on the ground of the abundant mercies and truth (cf. 24:27) He had shown him thus far, He would deliver him out of the hand of his brother, and from the threatening destruction, and so fulfil His promises" (K-D, 303). "Jacob's prayer for deliverance was graciously answered. God granted His favor to an undeserving sinner who cast himself wholly upon His mercy. Notice, that Jacob acted in accord with the proposition that often we should work as though we had never prayed" (HSB, 53). Hence the gifts (for appeasement) that followed, and preparations for conflict, if that should occur.

The Gifts, vv. 14-22. Although hoping for safety and aid from the Lord alone, Jacob neglected no means of doing what might serve to appease his brother. Having taken up his quarters for the night in the place where he received the news of Esau's approach, he selected from his flocks—of that which he had acquired—a very respectable present of 550 head of cattle, and sent them in different detachments to meet Esau, as a present unto "my lord Esau" from "thy servant Jacob," who was coming behind. The cattle were selected according to the proportions of male and female which were adopted from experience among the ancients (Varro, *de re rustica* 2, 3).

"V. 15—200 she-goats and twenty he-goats. Similarly, in the case of the other animals he sent as many males as were needed for the females (Rashi)" (SC, 197). "The selection was in harmony with the general possessions of nomads" (cf. Job 1:3, 42:12). The division of this gift into separate droves which followed one another at certain intervals, "was to serve the purpose of gradually mitigating the wrath of Esau" (K-D), to appease the countenance, to raise anyone's countenance, *i.e.*, to receive him in a friendly manner. "Jacob designs this gift to be the means of propitiating his brother before he appears in his presence. After dispatching this present, he himself remained the same night, the one referred to in v. 13, in the camp. Then and there one of the most fascinatingly and mysteriously sublime incidents recorded in the Old Testament occurred. (*Preparations to meet anticipated violence: see infra*). (*Recall that Jacob's threefold preparation consisted of prayer, gifts, and probability of war.*)

(3) *Jacob's Wrestling with the Celestial Visitant*, vv. 22-32. "The Jabbok is the present Wady *es Zerka* (*i.e.*, the blue, which flows from the east towards the Jordan, and with its deep rocky valley formed at that time the boundary between the kingdoms of Sihon at Heshbon and Og of Bashan. . . . The ford by which Jacob crossed was hardly the one which he took on his outward journey, upon the Syrian caravan-road . . . but one much farther to the west . . . where there are still traces of walls and buildings to be seen, and other marks of civilization" (K-D, 304). The same night (as indicated in v. 13) Jacob transported his family with all his possessions across the ford of the Jabbok, but he himself remained behind. The whole course of the Jabbok, "counting its windings, is over sixty miles. It is shallow and always fordable, except where it breaks between steep rocks. Its valley is fertile, has always been a frontier and a line of traffic" (UBD, *s.v.*) "The deep Jabbok Valley

supplied an impressive locale for Jacob's wrestling with an angel and for his reunion with the estranged Esau (Gen. 32:22ff.). The Jabbok is always shallow enough to ford (Gen. 32:23). Portions of its slopes are wooded, and dotted with patches of orchard, vineyard, and vegetable cultivation. Wheat is cultivated in its upper reaches. Flocks are usually within sight of travelers" (HBD, s.v.). The Jabbok flows into the Jordan about 25 miles north of the Dead Sea.

What was Jacob's purpose in this maneuver, especially his remaining on the north side of the Jabbok? There are differences of opinion about this. "To prayer he adds prudence, and sends forward present after present that their reiteration might win his brother's heart. This done, he rested for the night: but rising up before the day, he sent forward his wives and children across the ford of the Jabbok, remaining for a while in solitude to prepare his mind for the trial of the day" (OTH, 103). "*He rose up . . . and took*", etc. "Unable to sleep, he waded the ford in the night-time by himself; and having ascertained its safety, he returned to the north bank, and sent over his family and attendants—remaining behind, to seek anew, in solitary prayer, the Divine blessing on the means he had set in motion" (Jamieson, CECG, 215). Another view, as we have noted above, is that "Jacob sent his wives and children across the stream hoping their helplessness might touch Esau's heart; Jacob himself remained on this side of the stream; he would cross only at the last moment; possibly he would turn back and flee, without sheep and cattle, wives and children, to hinder his escape" (Morgens-tern). *The present writer finds it difficult to think of Jacob as being so cowardly as to be willing to sacrifice his household and possessions to save his own hide.* "Jacob himself remained on the north side [of the stream] (Delitzsch, Keil, Kurtz, Murphy, Gerlach, Wordsworth, Alford), although, having once crossed the stream (v.

22), it is not perfectly apparent that he recrossed, which has led some to argue that the wrestling occurred on the south of the river (Knobel, Rosenmuller, Lange Kalisch)" (PCG, 392). Rashbam would have it that "*he rose up that night*, intending to flee by another way; for that reason he passed over the ford of the Jabbok." As for his household (v. 22), and his possessions "that which he had" (v. 23), according to Nachmanides, "he led them all to the edge of the brook, then crossed over himself to see if the place was suitable, then returned and led them across all at the same time." Rashi would have it that having sent on all the others, Jacob himself after crossing, returned, "because he had forgotten some small items" (SC, 199).

Thus Jacob was left alone, and *there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day*, v. 24. "The natural thing for the master of the establishment to do is to stay behind to check whether all have crossed or whether some stragglers of this great host still need directions. In the solitude of the night as Jacob is 'left alone,' his thoughts naturally turn to prayer again, for he is a godly man. However, here the unusual statement of the case describes his prayer thus: 'a man wrestled with him until dawn arose.' Rightly Luther says: 'Every man holds that this text is one of the most obscure in the Old Testament.' There is no commentator who can so expound this experience as to clear up perfectly every difficulty involved. This much, however, is relatively clear: Jacob was praying; the terms used to describe the prayer make us aware of the fact that the prayer described involved a struggle of the entire man, body and soul; the struggle was not imaginary; Jacob must have sensed from the outset that his opponent was none other than God; this conviction became firmly established before his opponent finally departed. . . . The Biblical commentary on the passage is Hosea 12:4: 'Yea, he had power over the angel, and pre-

vailed; he wept, and made supplication unto him.' . . . Again, by way of commentary, 'wrestling' is defined as 'he wept and made supplication unto Him.' That certainly is a description of agonizing prayer. However, when v. 3 of Hosea 12 is compared, we learn that this struggle in Jacob's manhood was the culmination of the tendency displayed before birth, when by seizing his brother's heel he displayed how eager he was to obtain the spiritual blessings God was ready to bestow. This experience and this trend in Jacob's character is held up before his descendants of a later day that they may seek to emulate it" (Leupold, EG, 875). "*There wrestled a man with him:* to prevent him from fleeing, so that he might see how God kept the promise that he would not be harmed (Rashbam). Undoubtedly the angel was acting on God's command, and thereby intimated that Jacob and his seed would be saved and blessed, this being the outcome of the wrestling (Sforzo). *He prevailed not*, v. 26. Because Jacob cleaved so firmly to God in thought and speech (Sforzo). Because an angel can do only what he has been commissioned and permitted to do; this one was permitted only to strain his thigh (Nachmanides)" (SC, 199).

As Leupold states the case clearly, "certain modern interpretations of this experience of Jacob's [are] instances of how far explanations may veer from the truth and become entirely misleading. It has been described as a 'nightmare' (Roscher). Some have thought that Jacob engaged in conflict with the tutelary deity of the stream which Jacob was endeavoring to cross (Frazer), and so this might be regarded as a symbolical portrayal of the difficulties of the crossing. [e.g., "In the most ancient form of the story, the angel of Jacob may have reflected a folk tale about a night river-demon who must disappear with the morning light. When Israel made this legend its own, it transformed the demon into an angel, a messenger of God" (AtD, 88).] But the stream had already been

crossed by this time. One interpreter considers the wrestling as a symbol of 'the victory of the invading Israelites over the inhabitants of North Gilead,' (Steuernagel), but that is a misconstruction of history: the conquest began much later. Some call the experience a dream; others, an allegory. The most common device of our day is to regard it as a legend, 'originating,' as some say, 'on a low level of religion.' All such approaches are a slap in the face for the inspired word of Hosea who treats it as a historical event recording the highest development of Jacob's faith-life. For there can be no doubt about it that the motivating power behind Jacob's struggle is faith and the desire to receive God's justifying grace; and the means employed is earnest prayer. Why it pleases the Lord to appear in human guise to elicit the most earnest endeavors on Jacob's part, that we cannot answer" (EG, 876). (Cf. Gen. 18:1. See my *Genesis*, Vol. III, p. 297ff. See also our discussion of "The Angel of Jehovah," my *Genesis* III, 216-220, 496-500. See also Hosea 12:2-6: This is another proof of the hermeneutic principle that any Scripture passage must be interpreted in the light of the teaching of the entire Bible [see my *Genesis*, Vol. I, pp. 97-100] in order to get at truth).

When Jacob was left alone on the northern side of the Jabbok, after sending all the rest across, "*there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.*" V. 26—'*And when He [the unknown] saw that He did not overcome him, He touched his hip-socket; and his hip-socket was put out of joint, as He wrestled with Him.*' Still Jacob would not let Him go until He blessed him. He then said to Jacob, '*Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel*' [God's fighter]; *for thou hast fought with God and with men, and hast prevailed.*' When Jacob asked Him His name, He declined giving any definite answer, and 'blessed him there.' He did not tell him His name: not merely, as the angel stated to Manoah in reply

to a similar question (Judg. 13:18), because it was incomprehensible to mortal man, but still more to fill Jacob's soul with awe at the mysterious character of the whole event, and to lead him to take it to heart. What Jacob wanted to know, with regard to the person of the wonderful Wrestler, and the meaning and intention of the struggle, he must already have suspected, when he would not let Him go until He blessed him; and it was put before him still more plainly in the new name that was given to him with this explanation, '*Thou hast fought with Elobim and with men, and hast conquered.*' God had met him in the form of a man: God in the angel, according to Hosea 12:4-5, *i.e.*, not in a created angel, but in the Angel of Jehovah, the visible manifestation of the invisible God. Our history does not speak of Jehovah, or the Angel of Jehovah, but of *Elobim*, for the purpose of bringing out the contrast between God and the creature" (K-D, 304).

We are now ready to inquire: *Who was this Wonderful Wrestler?* Several identifications have been proposed; this writer, however, holds that there is one view, and one only, that is in accord with the teaching of the Bible as a whole (as we shall see *infra*). In the meantime, let us examine some of the proposed interpretations, some of which are far-fetched, to say the least. "This story, the antiquity of which is obvious, is probably the basic legend in the O.T. Jacob prevailed over his supernatural opponent; cf. Hosea 12:3-4. . . . A point to be noted is the superhuman strength ascribed to Jacob; with this may be compared the implications of 28:18, according to which Jacob himself set up the pillar at Bethel, and of 29:10, where he alone and unaided moved a stone which normally could be moved only through the combined efforts of a number of men (cf. 29:8-10). All three passages seem to echo the representation of Jacob as a giant" (IBG, 724). Concerning v. 26—*Let me go, for the dawn is breaking*, Skinner writes: "It is a survival of the wide-

spread belief in spirits of the night which must vanish at dawn (cf. *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene 1), and as such, a proof of the extreme antiquity of the legend." This commentator goes on to say, with respect to the blessing "imparted in the form of a new name conferred on Jacob in memory of this crowning struggle of his life": "Such a name [Israel] is a true 'blessing' as a pledge of victory and success to the nation which bears it. . . . This can hardly refer merely to the contests with Laban and Esau; it points rather to the existence of a fuller body of legend, in which Jacob figured as the hero of many combats, culminating in this successful struggle with deity." Again: "In its fundamental conception the struggle at Peniel is not a dream or vision like that which came to Jacob at Bethel; nor is it an allegory of the spiritual life, symbolising the inward travail of a soul helpless before some overhanging crisis of its destiny. It is a real physical encounter which is described, in which Jacob measures his strength and skill against a divine antagonist, and 'prevails' though at the cost of a bodily injury. No more boldly anthropomorphic narrative is found in Genesis; and unless we shut our eyes to some of its salient features, we must resign the attempt to translate it wholly into terms of religious experience. We have to do with a legend, originating at a low level of religion, in process of accommodation to the purer ideas of revealed religion. . . . In the present passage the god was probably not Yahwe originally, but a local deity, a night-spirit who fears the dawn and refuses to disclose his name. Dr. Frazer has pointed out that such stories as this are associated with water-spirits, and cites many primitive customs which seem to rest on the belief that a river resents being crossed, and drowns many who attempt it. He hazards the conjecture that the original deity of this passage was the spirit of the Jabbok. . . . Like many patriarchal theophanies, the narrative accounts for the foundation of a sanctuary—that of Peniel. . . . By J and

E the story was incorporated in the national epos as part of the history of Jacob. The God who wrestles with the patriarch is Yahwe; and how far the wrestling was understood as a literal fact remains uncertain. To these writers the main interest lies in the origin of the name Israel, and the blessing bestowed on the nation in the person of its ancestor. A still more refined interpretation is found, it seems to me, in Hosea 12:4-5: 'In the womb he overreached his brother, and in his prime he strove with God. He strove with the Angel and prevailed; he wept and made supplication to him.' The substitution of the Angel of Yahwe for the divine Being Himself shows increasing sensitiveness to anthropomorphism; and the last line appears to mark an advance in the spiritualising of the incident, the subject being not the Angel (as Gunkel and others hold) but Jacob, whose 'prevailing' thus becomes that of importunate prayer. We may note in a word Steuernagel's ethnological interpretation. He considers the wrestling to symbolize a victory of the invading Israelites over the inhabitants of N. Gilead. The change of name reflects the fact that a new nation (Israel) arose from the fusion of the Jacob and Rachel tribes" (ICCG, 411-412).

A somewhat modified view of the incident under consideration here is that of JB (53, n.): "This enigmatic story, probably 'Yahwistic,' speaks of a physical struggle, a wrestling with God from which Jacob seems to emerge victor. Jacob recognizes the supernatural character of his adversary and extorts a blessing from him. The text, however, avoids using the name of Yahweh and the unknown antagonist will not give his name. The author has made use of an old story as a means of explaining the name 'Peniel' ('face of God') and the origin of the name 'Israel.' At the same time he gives the story a religious significance; the patriarch holds fast to God and forces from him a blessing; henceforth all who bear Israel's name will have a claim on God. It is not surprising that this

dramatic scene later served as an image of the spiritual combat and of the value of persevering prayer (St. Jerome, Origen)."

It should be noted, in this connection, that the assumptions which form the basis of the views presented in the foregoing excerpts are completely without benefit of any external (historical) evidence whatsoever. They simply echo the general conclusions which originated largely in the thinking of Sir James Frazer (1854-1941), the Scottish anthropologist, as set forth in his monumental work, *The Golden Bough*. (Incidentally, many of these conclusions have been quite generally abandoned). As a matter of fact, the general theory under consideration had its first beginnings in the early twentieth-century effort to apply the "evolution" yardstick to every phase of human history and life. On this view religion is "explained" as a progressive refinement of human thinking about the various aspects of the mystery of being, especially those of death and life, originating with primitive *animism* according to which practically everything—and especially every *living* thing—was supposed to have its own particular tutelary spirit (either benevolent or demonic); then advancing to *polytheism*, in which the numerous gods and goddesses became personifications of natural forces; then to *henotheism*, in which a particular deity emerged as the sovereign of the particular pantheon; this leading naturally, it was said, to *monotheism*. But, according to this view, monotheism (such as that of the Bible) is yet not the end product. That end is, and will be, *pantheism*, in which God becomes one with the totality of being, the sum total of all intelligences constituting the mind of God and the sum total of all material things becoming the body of God, so to speak. This, we are assured, the so-called "religion of the intellectual," is bound to prevail universally. We are reminded of the man who once said that if he were a pantheist his first act of devotion on awakening each

morning would be that of turning over and reverently kissing his pillow. It should be clearly seen that these various speculations as to the purpose of this account of Jacob's wrestling, and as to the identity of the mysterious Wrestler himself, ignore completely the claim which the Bible makes for itself on almost every page, viz., that of bearing the *imprimatur* of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth (John 15:26-27, 16:13-15). Generally speaking, anthropologists and sociologists are in the same class with those disciples of John whom the Apostle Paul found at Ephesus (Acts 19:3) who declared that they did not even know that there is a Holy Spirit.

Of course, the identity of the Mysterious (Wonderful) Wrestler is inseparably linked with the divine purpose implicit in the whole incident. On this latter subject, Dr. Speiser writes as follows: "On several occasions, Abraham was favored with an insight into the divine purpose: the Covenant [ch. 15], the Cities of the Plain [ch. 18], the Ordeal of Isaac [ch. 22]. The wonder is greater in the case of Jacob, who would not appear offhand to be marked as an agent of destiny. Yet Jacob is afforded a glimpse of a higher role through the medium of his vision at Bethel, on the eve of his long sojourn with Laban. Now that he is about to return to Canaan, he is given a forewarning at Mahanaim, and is later subjected to the supreme test at Penuel. The general purpose of the Penuel episode should be thus sufficiently clear. In the light of the instance just cited, such manifestations either serve as forecasts or as tests. Abraham's greatest trial came at Moriah (ch. 22). That the meaning of Mahanaim was similar in kind, though clearly not in degree, is indicated by the [Hebrew text]. The real test, however, was reserved for Penuel—a desperate nocturnal struggle with a nameless adversary whose true nature did not dawn on Jacob until the physical darkness had begun to lift. The reader, of course, should not try to spell out details that the author

himself glimpsed as if through a haze. But there can surely be no doubt as to the far-reaching implications of the encounter. Its outcome is ascribed to the opponent's lack of decisive superiority. Yet this explanation should not be pressed unduly. For one thing, Jacob's injury was grave enough to cost him the contest, if such a result had been desired. And for another thing, the description now embodies three distinct aetiologies: (1) The basis for the name Israel; the change of names is itself significant of an impending change in status (as with Abraham and Sarah: see 17:5, 15); (2) the origin of the name Penuel, for which a basis is laid in vss. 21-22 by their fivefold use of the stem *pny* (von Rad); (3) the dietary taboo about the sciatic muscle. Any one of these motifs would suffice to color the whole account. One may conclude, accordingly, that the encounter at Penuel was understood as a test of Jacob's fitness for the larger tasks that lay ahead. The results were encouraging. Though he was left alone to wrestle through the night with a mysterious assailant, Jacob did not falter. The effort left its mark—a permanent injury to remind Jacob of what had taken place, and to serve perhaps as a portent of things to come. Significantly enough, Jacob is henceforth a changed person. The man who could be a party to a cruel hoax that was played on his father and brother, and who fought Laban's treachery with crafty schemes of his own, will soon condemn the vengeful deed by Simeon and Levi (ch. 34) by invoking a higher concept of morality" (ABG, 256).

The Heavenly Visitant: "an unknown person," writes Jamieson, "appeared suddenly to oppose his [Jacob's] entrance into Canaan. Jacob engaged in the encounter with all the mental energy, and grasped his opponent with all the physical tenacity he could exert; till the stranger, unable to shake him off or to vanquish him, touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh—the socket of the femoral joint—

which was followed by an instant and total inability to continue the contest. This mysterious person is called an angel by Jacob himself (48:15, 16) and God (v. 28, 30; Hos. 12:3, 4); and the opinion that is most supported . . . is, that he was 'the angel of the covenant,' who, in a visible form, prelude the incarnation, as was frequently done, appeared to animate the mind, and sympathize with the distress, of his pious servant" (CECG, 215). It should be noted here, as pointed out *infra* by "C.H.M." (Mackintosh), that "it was not Jacob wrestling with a man, but a man wrestling with Jacob." The Mysterious Wrestler sought to accomplish some special end in and for Jacob, not *vice versa*. Mackintosh continues: "in Jacob's case, the divine object was to bring him to see what a poor, feeble, worthless creature he was," etc. We must not lose sight of this most important aspect of the whole incident. Jacob simply had to get away from (crucify) self, in order to "steadily and happily walk with God." (Just as Christians—indeed the saints of all ages—must take up the yoke of self-crucifixion before they can truly company with Christ: cf. Matt. 11:29, 30; Gal. 6:14).

Who was the "man" who wrestled with Jacob? Lange writes: "Some have absurdly held that he was an assassin sent by Esau. Origen: The night-wrestler was an evil spirit (Eph. 6:12). Other fathers hold that he was a good angel. The correct view is that he was the constant revealer of God, the Angel of the Lord. Delitzsch holds 'that it was a manifestation of God, who through the angel was represented and visible as a man.' The well-known refuge from the reception of the Angel of the Incarnation! In his view, earlier explained and refuted, Jacob could not be called the captain, prince of God, but merely the captain, prince of the Angel. 'No one writer in the Pentateuch,' Knobel says, 'so represents God under the human form of things as this one.' Jacob surely,

with his prayers and tears, has brought God, or the Angel of the Lord, more completely into the human form and likeness than had ever occurred before. The man with whom he wrestles is obviously not only the angel, but the type also of the future incarnation of God. As the angel of his face, however, he marks the development of the form of the angel of revelation which is taken up and carried on in Exodus. The angel and type of the incarnation is at the same time an angel and type of atonement. When Kurtz says 'that God here meets Jacob as an enemy, that he makes an hostile attack,' the expressions are too strong. There is an obvious distinction between a wrestler and one who attacks an enemy, leaving out of view the fact, that there is nothing said here as to which party made the assault. After the revelations which Jacob received at Bethel, Haran, and Mahanaim, a peculiar hostile relation to God is out of the question. So much, certainly, is true, that Jacob, to whom no mortal sins are imputed for which he must overcome the wrath of God (Kurtz, the divine wrath is not overcome, but atoned), must now be brought to feel that in all his sins against men he has striven and sinned against God, and that he must first of all be reconciled to him, for all the hitherto unrecognized sins of his life. The wrestling of Jacob has many points of resemblance to the restoration of Peter (John 21). As this history of Peter does not treat of the reconstituting of his general relation to Jesus, but rather of the perfecting of that relation, and with this of the restitution of his apostolic calling and office, so here the struggle of Jacob does not concern so much the question of his fundamental reconciliation with Jehovah, but the completion of that reconciliation and the assurance of his faith in his patriarchal calling. And if Christ then spake to Peter, when thou wast young thou girdedst thyself, etc., in order that he might know that henceforth an entire reliance upon the leading and protection of God

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must take the place of his sinful feeling of his own strength and his attachment to his own way, so, doubtless, the lameness of Jacob's thigh has the same significance, with this difference, that as Peter must be cured of the self-will of his rash, fiery temperament, so Jacob from his selfish prudence, tending to more cunning. A like relation holds between their old and new names. The name Simon, in the narrative of Peter's restoration, points to his old nature, just as here the name Jacob to the old nature of Israel" (CDHCG, 554-555).

Let the following excerpt give "the conclusion of the whole matter," the only conclusion that is in harmony with Biblical teaching as a whole: "Vv. 24-28. The Son of God in human form appeared to Jacob as if he intended to cast him down; but Jacob, enabled of God with bodily, and chiefly spiritual strength, in fervent prayer prevailed over what opposition Christ gave him. To render him sensible of his weakness, Christ disjoined his thigh, 2 Cor. 12:7; but after encouraging his supplications, he changed his name as a token of bettering his condition. Hence, when the church is represented as infirm, she is called *Jacob*, Amos 7:2, 5, 8; Isa. 41:14; but when her valor and excellency are signified, she is called *Israel*, Gal. 6:16. Thus God gave Jacob strength to overcome, and also the reward and praise of the victory" (SIBG, 266). (On "The Angel of Jehovah," see again my *Genesis*, Vol. III, pp. 216-220, 375-377, 496-500).

(4) *The Change of Name*, vv. 26-29. V. 26—The Mysterious Wrestler said to Jacob, *Let me go*, that is to say, literally, *send me away*; meaning that he yielded the victory to Jacob, assigning as his reason, *for the day breaks*, that is, *the dawn is ascending*; meaning, *it is time for you to proceed to your other duties*. Or, perhaps the heavenly Visitant was not willing that the vision which was meant for Jacob only should be seen by others, or perhaps that His own glory should be seen by Jacob.

And Jacob replied, *I will not let you go, except you bless me.* And the Heavenly Wrestler said, *What is your name?* (not as if demanding to be informed, but to direct attention to it in view of the change about to be made in it). And the patriarch replied, *Jacob.* Said the Other, *Your name shall be called no more, Jacob,* that is, Heel-catcher or Supplanter (cf. 25:26), *but Israel,* "prince of God," or perhaps "wrestler with God." "Instead of a supplanter, he has now become the holy wrestler with God, hence his name is no longer Jacob, but Israel. There is no trace in his after-history of the application of his wisdom to mere selfish and cunning purposes. But the new name confirms to him in a word the theocratic promise, as the name Abraham confirmed it to Abram (35:10)" (Lange). *And hast prevailed:* having overcome in his wrestling with God, he need have no fears concerning his approaching meeting with Esau. "The question about Jacob's name is rhetorical. The object is to contrast the old name with the new and thereby mark the change in Jacob's status" (Speiser). "The name [Israel] is best explained etymologically as 'May El persevere.' But both Jacob and Israel are treated here symbolically, to indicate the transformation of a man once devious (Jacob) into a forthright and resolute fighter" (Speiser, 255). "Just as God changed Abram's name to Abraham, He now changes Jacob's name to Israel, by which the Hebrews are henceforth to be known. It is a name for the people and for an individual. The normative use of *Israel* in the Bible denotes the people just as *American* denotes a citizen of the United States (HSB, 54, n.). "It shall no more be said that you attained the blessings by 'supplanting' (root *akab*), but through 'superiority' (root *sar*). God will appear to you at Bethel, change your name and bless you; I will be there too and admit your right to the blessings (Rashi)" (SC, 200). "In Scripture the name indicates the nature of the office; here the change of a

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name denoted the exaltation of person and of dignity. Jacob was raised to be a prince, and a prince with God! A royal priesthood was conferred upon him; the privilege of admission into the Divine presence, and the right of presenting petitions, and of having them granted. And all this was granted to him, not as an individual merely, but as a public personage—the head and representative of those who in after-times should possess like faith and a similar spirit of prayer. Nothing could be more dissimilar than Israel's real dignity and his outward condition—an exile and a suppliant, scarcely escaped from the hands of Laban, and seemingly about to perish by the revenge of his brother—yet possessing an invisible power that secured the success of his undertakings. By prayer he could prevail with God; and through Him who overrules all the thoughts of the heart, he could prevail with men also, though they are harder to be entreated than the King of kings. . . . The word *men* is in the plural, as indicating that he had not only prevailed over Isaac and over Laban, who presented obstacles to the fulfilment of the Divine promise, but that he would prevail in overcoming the wrath of his vindictive brother, and giving him a pledge that, wherever he might go, he would be an object of the Divine care and protection" (Jamieson, 216). "Man is a child of two worlds, Gen. 2:7. His body is of the dust, but his spirit is the Breath of God, inbreathed by God Himself. For twenty years these two natures had striven with each other [in Jacob]. This struggle is typical. There is no assurance that good will triumph of itself; it must be supported by strength of will and determination for the right, which endure for all time and under all circumstances. Men become changed, blessed by the very evil powers with which they have striven. No longer the old Jacob, but now the new Israel. Yet man never remains unscathed. Victory over evil is never gained in the darkness of the night. So with the dawn Jacob became a new man, with

an appropriate new name, 'Champion of God.' Then he crossed the river" (Morgenstern).

A like relation holds, writes Lange, between the old and new names of Jacob and Peter. "The name Simon, in the narrative of Peter's restoration (John 21), points to his old nature, just as here the name Jacob to the old nature of Israel. Simon's nature, however, was not purely evil, but tainted with evil. This is true also of Jacob. He must be purified and freed from his sinful cunning, but not from his prudence and constant perseverance. Into these latter features of his character he was consecrated as Israel. The name Abram passes over into the name Abraham, and is ever included in it; the name Isaac has in itself a two-fold significance, which intimates the laughter of doubt, and that of a joyful faith; but the name Jacob goes along with that of Israel, not merely because the latter was preeminently the name of the people, nor because in the new-birth the old life continues side by side, and only gradually disappears, but also because it designates an element of lasting worth, and still further, because Israel must be continually reminded of the contrast between its merely natural and its sacred destination. The sacred and honored name of the Israelitish people, descends from this night-wrestling of Israel, just as the name Christian comes from the birth and name of Christ. The peculiar destination of the Old-Testament children of the covenant is that they should be warriors, princes of God, men of prayer, who carry on the conflicts of faith to victory. Hence the name Israelites attains completeness in that of Christians, those who are divinely blessed, the anointed of God. The name Jews, in its derivation from Judah, in their Messianic destination, forms the transition between these names. They are those who are praised, who are a praise and glory to God. But the contrast between the cunning, running into deceit, which characterized the old nature of Jacob, and the persevering

struggle of faith and prayer of Israel, pervades the whole history of the Jewish people, and hence Hosea (ch. 12:1ff.) applies it to the Jewish people. . . . The force of this contrast lies in this, that in the true Israelite there is no guile, since he is purified from guile (John 1:47), and that Christ, the king of Israel (v. 44), is without guile, while the deceit of the Jacob nature reaches its most terrible and atrocious perfection in the kiss of Judas" (CDHCG, 555).

V. 29—Jacob now requests the Mysterious Wrestler to reveal *His* name. The actual meaning of this request was obviously equivalent to asking the latter *to reveal His identity*. "The reply is in part the same as that of the Angel who was asked the same question by Manoah (Judg. 13:18), only here the continuation of the answer is omitted—'seeing it is wonderful.' Several reasons for the somewhat evasive reply may be discerned. The one that presents itself first is that the question in reply practically means: 'Why ask to know My identity, seeing you already know it?' Add to this the fact that, as Luther indicates, the failure to reply leaves the name as well as the whole experience shrouded in mystery, and mysteries invite further reflection. In spiritual experiences there is and must be the challenge of the mysterious. In spiritual experiences there is and must be the challenge of the mysterious. A spiritual experience so lucid that a man sees through and is able to analyze every part of it must be rather shallow. And lastly, the blessing about to be imparted is a further revelation of His name and being, that carries Jacob as far as he needs to be brought. . . . The blessing spoken of is an added blessing. The substance of this added blessing we do not know. Luther's supposition is as much to the point as any when he remarks that it may have been the great patriarchal blessing concerning the coming Messiah through whom as Jacob's 'seed' all the families of the earth were to be blessed" (EG, 280-281).

(5) *Peniel*, v. 30. The remembrance of the mysterious struggle with the celestial Wrestler Jacob now perpetuated in the name which he gave to the place where it had occurred. He named the place *Peniel*: "*for, said he, I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.*" The significance of this statement is the fact that he had seen God *face to face*, and *yet lived* (cf. Exo. 33:11, Deut. 34:10, Isa. 6:5); cf. especially Exo. 33:20. *Peniel*, also called *Penuel*, meant "face of God." This was one of the two towns east of the Jordan which was destroyed by Gideon because it had refused to aid him in his pursuit of the Midianites (Judg. 8:8ff., esp. v. 17, also 1 Ki. 12:25). "The common belief in ancient Israel was that no mortal could see God's face and live, Exo. 33:20" (Morgenstern).

The reason for the name is assigned in the sentence, *I have seen God face to face*, etc. "Divine manifestations deserve to be commemorated in every possible way. Jacob marks this one for himself and for his descendants by giving a distinctive name to the place where it occurred. Though 'Peniel' like 'Mahanaim' has not been definitely located, it may still be a used ford of the Jabbok near Jordan and is mentioned in Judg. 8 and 1 Kings 12:25. This name should not be said to be 'derived from an incidental feature of the experience.' That would be the equivalent of saying: Jacob was unhappy in his choice of a name for this memorable spot. Of course, his experience was a purifying one that was to break self-trust and cast him wholly upon God's mercy. But this experience centered in a personal encounter with God, a direct meeting of God, a seeing of Him, though not with the eye of the body. Does not the whole experience, then, sum itself up as a seeing of God and living to tell of it, though sinful nature should perish at so holy a contact? The name touches upon the essence of Jacob's experience. For *Peniel* means 'face of God.' The explanation really says more than 'my life, or soul, was spared.' For *natsal* means 'delivered' or 'pre-

served.' God did more than let no harm come to Jacob; He again restored him who otherwise would surely have perished. . . . With an adequate and historically accurate account of the origin of the name 'Peniel' before us, we may well wonder at those who under such circumstances go far afield and try to account for its origin by comparing the Phoenician promontory of which Strabo speaks, which was called *theon prosopon* ('face of God'). Those who have lost their respect for God's Word no longer hear what it says and make fools of themselves in their wisdom by inventing fanciful explanations for that which has been supplied with an authentic explanation" (EG, 881-882). (Cf. 1 Cor. 2:14, 1:18-30).

"*Peniel*—the face of God. The reason of this name is assigned in the sentence, *I have seen God face to face*. He is at first called a man. Hosea terms him *the angel* (12:4, 5 (3, 4)). And here Jacob names him God. Hence some men, deeply penetrated with the ineffable grandeur of the divine nature, are disposed to resolve the first act at least into an impression on the imagination. We do not pretend to define with undue nicety the mode of this wrestling. And we are far from saying that every sentence of Scripture is to be understood in a literal sense. But until some cogent reason be assigned, we do not feel at liberty to depart from the literal sense in this instance. The whole theory of a revelation from God to man is founded upon the principle that God can adapt himself to the apprehension of the being whom he has made in his own image. This principle we accept, and we dare not limit its application *further than the demonstrative laws of reason and conscience demand*. If God walk in the garden with Adam, expostulate with Cain, give a specification of the ark to Noah, partake of the hospitality of Abraham, take Lot by the hand to deliver him from Sodom, we cannot affirm that he may not, for a worthy end, enter into a bodily conflict with Jacob. These various mani-

festations of God to man differ only in degree. If we admit any one, we are bound by parity of reason to accept all the others" (Murphy, MG, 414).

Vv. 31, 32: *The sun rose upon Jacob as he passed over Penuel, and he limped upon his thigh.* The sun rose upon him: "there was sunshine within and sunshine without. When Judas went forth on his dark design, we read, 'It was night,' John 13:30." He halted on his thigh: "thus carrying with him a memorial of his conflict, as Paul afterwards bore about with him a stake in his flesh (2 Cor. 12:7)" "A new day of light and of hope was dawning for Jacob after the night of gloom and despair." Note the phrases, "*the hollow of Jacob's thigh*" and "*in the sinew of the hip*." "With the rising of the sun after the night of his conflict, the night of anguish and fear also passed away from Jacob's mind, so that he was able to leave Penuel in comfort, and go forward on his journey. The dislocation of the thigh alone remained. For this reason the children of Israel are accustomed to avoid eating the *nervus ischiadicus*, the principal nerve in the neighborhood of the hip, which is easily injured by any violent strain in wrestling. '*Upon this day*': the remark is applicable still" (K-D, 307). "There is no mention of this ancient food-law elsewhere in the Bible" (JB, 55). "God did not demand this ritual observance in the Mosaic law, but the descendants of Israel of their own accord instituted the practice because they recognized how extremely important this experience of Jacob was for him and for themselves. Some interpret this *gidh hannasheh* to be the sciatic nerve. Delitzsch tells us that Jewish practice defines it as the inner vein on the hindquarter together with the outer vein plus the ramifications of both" (EG, 883). "The author explains the custom of the Israelites, in not eating of the sinew of the thigh, by a reference to this touch of the hip of their ancestor by God. Through this divine touch, this sinew, like the

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blood (ch. 9:4) was consecrated and sanctified to God. This custom is not mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament; the Talmudists, however (Tract. Cholin, Mischna, 7), regard it as a law, whose transgression was to be punished with several stripes (Knobel)" (Lange, 550).

"Hebrew, *nervus ischiaticus*, the nerve or tendon that extends from the top of the thigh down the whole leg to the ankles. . . . Josephus (*Antiquities*, Bk. I, ch. 20, sec. 2) renders it more correctly *the broad sinew*. 'Jacob himself,' continues that historian, abstained from eating that sinew ever afterwards; and for his sake it is still not eaten by us.' The practice of the Jews in abstaining from eating this in the flesh of animals is not founded on the law of Moses, but is merely a traditional usage. The sinew is carefully extracted; and where there are no persons skilled enough for that operation, they do not make use of the hind legs at all. Abstinence from this particular article of animal food is universally practised by the Jews. and is so peculiar a custom in their daily observance, that as the readers of 'The Jews in China' will remember, the worship of that people is designated by the name of the *Teaou-kin-keaou*, or 'Pluck-sinew-religion.' This remarkable incident formed a turning-point in the life of Jacob—a point at which he was raised above the deceit and the worldliness of his past life into higher and more spiritual relations with God. Those who regard it as a vision, an ecstasy during which all the powers of his nature were intensely excited, so that, in fact, he was above and out of himself, consider the impression made upon his limb as the effect of 'a mental struggle, involving a strain so severe, not on the moral only, but also on the physical being of the terrified man, that the muscles of his body bore the mark ever after. Such results of wild emotion are not of infrequent occurrence in persons of enthusiastic temperament, as is exemplified by the proceedings of the dancing dervishes of our own time.' But that it was not

merely a vision or internal agony of the soul—that it was a real transaction—appears not only from a new designation given to Jacob himself, which was always in memory of some remarkable event, and from the significant name which he bestowed upon the scene of this occurrence, but from the fact of the wound he received being in a part of his body so situated that Jacob must have been assured no mere man could have so *touched* it as to effect a dislocation. No objection can be urged against the appearance of the Divine Being on this occasion in the form of humanity that will not equally militate against the reality of similar manifestations already regarded as being made in the experience of the patriarchs. There was a special propriety in the appearance of ‘the angel of the Lord’ as a man on this occasion, and in his assuming the attitude of a foe, to convince Jacob that, in order to overcome his formidable brother, he must first overcome God, not by the carnal weapons with which he had heretofore obtained his advantages over men, but by the spiritual influence of faith and prayer. Hence, when the contest was at first carried on as between man and man, Jacob appeared more athletic and powerful. But his antagonist having wounded him in such a manner as could only have been done by a being of a superior nature, his eyes were opened: he found himself unconsciously striving with God, and his self-confidence utterly failed, so that forthwith he desisted from the struggle, and had recourse to supplication and tears (Hos. 12:4). In short, this wrestling was a symbolic act, designed to show Jacob that he had no hope of conquering his powerful foe by stratagem, reliance on his own strength—as his lameness indeed proved—or by any other means than a firm, unwavering trust in the word of that covenant God who had promised (ch. 28:13-15), and would establish him in, the possession of Canaan as an inheritance to his posterity. ‘Hosea clearly teaches that Jacob merely completed, by his wrestling with God,

what he had already been engaged in from his mother's womb—viz., his striving for the birthright; in other words, for the possession of the covenant promise and the covenant blessing' (Delitzsch)" (Jamieson, CECG, 216, 217).

(6) *Reconciliation with Esau* (33:1-17). All preparations as recorded in chapter 32 having been completed, at daybreak Jacob had just crossed the stream when he looked ahead "*and behold, Esau was coming,*" and one glance was sufficient to show that the brother was accompanied by his contingent of four hundred men. Jacob then took certain other precautionary measures. He arranged his wives and his children "in climactic order" so that the most beloved came last and hence were in the proper position to be spared if none else were. The maids with their children were in the front, Leah with hers were in the middle, and Rachel with Joseph were at the rear of the procession. Jacob then put himself in the forefront, thus to be first in the way of danger should any develop. As he proceeded toward his brother *he bowed himself seven times*. "The manner of doing this is by looking towards a superior and bowing with the upper part of the body brought parallel to the ground, then advancing a few steps and bowing again, and repeating this obeisance till, at the seventh time, the suppliant stands in the immediate presence of his superior." "This seems to mean that Jacob, on approaching his brother, stopped at intervals and bowed, and then advanced and bowed again, until the seventh bow brought him near to his brother. This was a mark of profound respect, nor need we suppose there was any simulation of humility in it, for it was, and is, customary for elder brothers to be treated by the younger with great respect in the East" (SIBG, 267). "The sevenfold prostration is a widespread custom attested also in the Amarna letters and those of Ugarit" (AtD, 91). Jacob "approaches his brother with the reverence befitting a sovereign; the sevenfold prostration

is a favorite formula of homage in the Tel Amarna tablets: 'At the feet of my Lord, my Sun, I fall down seven and seven times.' It does not follow, however, that Jacob acknowledged himself Esau's vassal" (ICCG, 413). Other commentators differ somewhat: *e.g.*, "By this manifestation of deep reverence (not complete prostration, but a deep Oriental bow, in which the head approaches the ground, but does not touch it), Jacob hoped to win his brother's heart. He humbled himself before him as the elder, with the feeling that he had formerly sinned against him. Esau, on the other hand, 'had a comparatively better, but not so tender a conscience.' At the sight of Jacob he was carried away by the natural feelings of brotherly affection, and running up to him, embraced him, fell on his neck, and kissed him; and they both wept. . . . Even if there was still some malice in Esau's heart, it was overcome by the humility with which his brother met him, so that he allowed free course to the generous emotions of his heart; all the more, because the 'roving life' which suited his nature had procured him such wealth and power, that he was quite equal to his brother in earthly possessions" (K-D, 307, 308). Commentators differ in their interpretation of the emotions of the two brothers in this confrontation. "It is difficult to characterize," writes Skinner, "the spirit in which the main incident is conceived. Was Esau's purpose friendly from the first, or was he turned from thoughts of vengeance by Jacob's submissive and flattering demeanor? Does the writer regard the reconciliation as equally honorable to both parties, or does he only admire the skill and knowledge of human nature with which Jacob tames his brother's ferocity? The truth probably lies between two extremes. That Esau's intention was hostile, and that Jacob gained a diplomatic victory over him, cannot reasonably be doubted. On the other hand, the narrator must be acquitted of a desire to humiliate Esau. If he was

vanquished by generosity, the noblest qualities of manhood were released in him; and he displays a chivalrous magnanimity which no appreciative audience could ever have held in contempt. So far as any national feeling is reflected, it is one of genuine respect and goodwill towards the Edomites" (ICCG, 412). "Only God working in the heart of Esau explains the change in him as he greets Jacob in a friendly, not in a hostile, manner" (HSB, 55). Speiser seems to present the most sensible view: "The meeting between the two brothers turned out to be an affectionate reunion. Jacob's apprehensions had proved unfounded and his elaborate precautions altogether unnecessary. While the intervening twenty years could not erase Jacob's sense of guilt, Esau's resentment had long since vanished" (ABG, 260). "*Esau ran . . . fell on his neck and kissed him.* What a sudden and surprising change! Whether the sight of the princely present and the profound homage of Jacob had produced this effect, or it had proceeded from the impulsive character of Esau, the cherished enmity of twenty years in a moment disappeared; the weapons of war were laid aside, and the warmest tokens of mutual affection reciprocated between the brothers. But doubtless the efficient cause was the secret, subduing influence of grace (Prov. 21:1) which converted Esau from an enemy into a friend. This is an exact description of a meeting between relatives in the East, especially to a member of the family who has returned home after a long absence. They place their hands on his neck, kiss each cheek, and then lean their heads for some seconds, during their fond embrace, on each other's shoulders. It is their customary mode of testifying affection, and though it might not have been expected from Esau to Jacob, his receiving his brother with such a cordial greeting was in accordance with the natural kindness and generosity of his character" (Jamieson, 217). (Cf. Luke 15:20). "So it comes about that in this

chapter, as in some of the earlier ones, Esau seems at first the better of the two brothers. Jacob is full of inhibitions; Esau has none, and lets himself go wherever the flood of his emotion turns. Jacob makes his elaborate plans to placate what he thinks will be Esau's long-cherished wrath. Esau has dismissed that long ago, and the instinct uppermost in him is just the old one of kinship. So he ran to meet Jacob, *and fell on his neck, and kissed him*. He is unconcerned with all the presents Jacob tries to urge upon him; he does not want them. And note the difference in the way each of the two speaks to the other. Jacob, fearful and anxious, says of the presents he is offering, *These are to find grace in the sight of my lord*. But Esau waves them aside, because he has enough, and because Jacob is *my brother*. How strange are the mingled elements in human characters! Esau was to be reckoned as the 'profane' man; and in the end, of the two he was the failure. Yet in immediate ways he seemed often so much more attractive: for he was vigorous, warmhearted, and too essentially good-natured to carry a grudge. One can see men like him in every generation—impulsive, friendly men who seem to like everybody, and whom it is easy for everybody to like. Yet their fatal weakness may be, as with Esau, that they are too easygoing to care greatly about the values of life that matter most. Consider, on the other hand, Jacob. Even yet he was not finished with the consequences of old wrongs. He is distrustful of Esau because he knows that he has not deserved kindness at his hands. That is always one of the possible penalties of wrongdoing. A man projects into the imagined feelings of others the condemnation he inwardly visits upon himself. He dares not assume their good will, or even take the risk of believing in it when it is made plain. So Jacob not only tried anxiously to buy Esau's favor, but when Esau showed that he had it without any price, Jacob

was still incredulous; and the one thing he wanted to do was to separate from Esau as soon as he plausibly could (vss. 12-15). And yet, and yet—this Jacob is the one who at Peniel had ‘prevailed,’ had ‘seen God face to face,’ and who would prevail. The reason was in the fact which the earlier chapters already had prefigured, that this man in spite of his faults never lost the consciousness that his life must try to relate itself to God” (IBG, 730, 731). We must conclude that in this closing scene in the lives of these two brothers, *Esau was still being Esau*. After all, the only charge against him is that he was *profane*: he lived his life outside the temple of God, *out in this present evil world*. And Jacob, in spite of the fact of his growth in his spiritual life, was still, to some extent, Jacob. And as Jacob he would before much time had elapsed suffer the loss of his beloved Rachel and in his later years experience a more terrible deception, one that would involve profound tragedy leading to what was equivalent to exile from the Land of Promise and subsequent galling bondage for his posterity.

Vv. 5-7: We read that Esau’s eyes fell on the women and children who were following Jacob, and naturally he inquired as to who they were. Jacob replied, “The children with whom Elohim has graciously favored me.” Whereupon the mothers and their children approached in order, also making reverential obeisance. Vv. 8-11: Esau then inquired about the *company* (A.V., *drove*) that had met him, that is, the presents of cattle that were sent to meet him, and, assuring Jacob that he had enough of this world’s goods, at first refused to accept this gift; on Jacob’s insistence however, he was finally persuaded to do so. Note v. 10 especially: “The thought is this: In thy countenance I have been met with divine (heavenly) friendliness (cf. 1 Sam. 29:9, 2 Sam. 14:17). Jacob might say this without cringing, since he ‘must have discerned the work of God in the unexpected change in his brother’s disposition

toward him, and in his brother's friendliness a reflection of the divine.' " V. 11—"I have enough," literally, "all." Not all kinds of things; but viz., as the heir of the Divine Promise.

Vv. 12-15. Esau proposes to accompany Jacob on his way. The latter, however, declines. Some commentators persist in thinking that Jacob was still suspicious of Esau's intentions. This hardly seems possible. We prefer the explanation which Jacob himself made: it has the ring of truth. "Lastly, Esau proposed to accompany Jacob on his journey. But Jacob politely declined not only his own company, but also the escort, which Esau afterwards offered him, of a portion of his attendants; the latter as being unnecessary, the former as likely to be injurious to his flocks. This did not spring from any feeling of distrust; and the ground assigned was no mere pretext." He needed no military guard, "for he knew he was defended by the hosts of God"; his refusal was dictated by the exigencies of his household and his animals: a caravan, with small children and "cattle" that required care, could not possibly keep pace with Esau and his horsemen, without suffering harm. And Jacob could hardly expect his brother to accommodate himself to the pace at which he was traveling. For this reason he wished Esau to go on first, explaining that he would drive gently behind, "according to the pace at which the cattle and the children could go" (Luther). V. 14—*until I come unto my lord unto Seir*. "These words are not to be understood as meaning that he, Jacob, intended to go direct to Seir; consequently they were not a wilful deception for the purpose of getting rid of Esau. Jacob's destination was Canaan, and in Canaan probably Hebron, where his father Isaac still lived. From thence he may have thought of paying a visit to Esau in Seir. Whether he carried out this intention or not, we cannot tell; for we have not a record of all that Jacob did, but only of the principal

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events of his life. We afterwards find them both meeting together as friends at their father's funeral (35:29). Again, the attitude of inferiority which Jacob assumed in his conversation with Esau, addressing him as lord, and speaking of himself as servant, was simply an act of courtesy suited to the circumstances, in which he paid to Esau the respect due to the head of a powerful band; since he could not conscientiously have maintained the attitude of a brother, when inwardly and spiritually, in spite of Esau's friendly meeting, they were so completely separated, the one from the other" (K-D, 308-309). (We cannot agree that there was any fawning, any cringing demeanor, on Jacob's part, in these various exchanges with Esau; that in fact there was anything more involved than the conventional courtesies which have always been given such strict observance among the heads of different clans or tribes of the Near East.)

Here, in chapter 33, the long and fascinating story of the relationship of Esau and Jacob comes to its end. Esau, we are told, sets out "on his way unto Seir" (not the prospective Mount Seir or the Edom which was the equivalent of Mount Seir, which Esau and his people occupied after Isaac's death, 35:27-29, 36:1-8, but the Land of Seir, the Field of Edom, south and east of Beersheba, over which Esau first extended his occupancy, 32:3). And Jacob and his retinue pushed on to Shechem (33:18) and finally to Hebron (35:27).

Jacob journeyed first to Succoth, v. 17 (that is, "booths"). Succoth is now usually identified with *Tell Deir-'Alla*, a short distance east of the Jordan and north of the Jabbok, *i.e.*, near the point of confluence of the two rivers. The fact that he built a house indicates a residence there of several years, as also does the fact that when Dinah came to Shechem (ch. 34) she was already mature. "Jacob erected at this stage his (moveable) house or tent for his family while the booths were for his cattle,

The flocks in the East being generally allowed to remain in the open fields by night and day during winter and summer, and seldom put under cover, the erection of booths by Jacob is recorded as an unusual circumstance, and perhaps the almost tropical climate of the Jordan valley may have rendered some shelter necessary. Succoth, which is mentioned here by a prolepsis, was the name given to the first station at which Jacob halted on his arrival in Canaan. His posterity, when dwelling in houses of stone, built a city there and called it Succoth, to commemorate the fact of their ancestor having made it a halting-place" (Jamieson, 218). The town itself stood, if its position is rightly indicated on the maps, south of the Jabbok, in the angle formed by this stream and the Jordan, and almost equidistant from both. The name *Succoth* was derived from the peculiar type of hut or booth built for sheltering cattle. These booths, reported by travelers as being still occupied by Bedouins of the Jordan valley, are described as "rude huts of reeds, sometimes covered with long grass, and sometimes with a piece of tent" (Whitelaw, PCG, 401). Evidently Succoth was the other town east of the Jordan that was destroyed by Gideon (Judg., ch. 8). The reference to the name and its meaning, "booths," seems to indicate that this was a singular circumstance. Jacob's motive here "does not appear, but it was, and is, unusual in the East to put the flocks and herds under cover. They remain night and day, winter and summer, in the open air" (SIBG, 267).

Some commentators hold that Jacob was still distrustful of Esau, even at the time of their parting, it would seem, amicably. *E.g.*, the following comment on v. 14—"Jacob was still distrustful of Esau. He had himself practised cunning and deception, and now he was harassed by the fear of others, when in reality there was no cause. His words to Esau must have left the impression that he would follow him to Seir at such a pace

as the cattle and children could bear; but the moment Esau and his formidable escort set out southward, Jacob turned westward and crossed the Jordan" (SIBG, 267). How long Jacob remained in Succoth we cannot determine from the text. "We may conclude that he stayed there some years, from the circumstance, that by erecting a house and huts he prepared for a lengthened stay. The motives which induced him to remain there are also unknown to us. But when *Knobel* adduces the fact, that Jacob came to Canaan for the purpose of visiting Isaac (31:18), as a reason why it is improbable that he continued long at Succoth, he forgets that Jacob could visit his father from Succoth just as well as from Shechem, and that, with the number of people and cattle that he had about him, it was impossible that he should join and subordinate himself to Isaac's household, after having attained through his past life and the promises of God a position of patriarchal independence" (K-D, 310). (According to Josh. 13:27, Succoth was in the Jordan valley and was allotted to the tribe of Gad as a part of the district of the Jordan, 'on the other side of Jordan eastward,' and this is confirmed in Judg. 8:4-5.)

(Parenthetically, we call attention to the word 'cattle' as it is used in the translation of these patriarchal narratives. The student may find the word confusing, because it is used with varying degrees of ambiguity. When the children of Israel arrived in Egypt, they were assigned to the land of Goshen, with its pastoral facilities, where they became herdsmen and shepherds to Pharaoh. The Egyptian economy was that of a feudal system: the land was owned by the Pharaoh.) In the Old Testament, the word *mikneh*, translated *cattle*, signifies *possessions*. The specific words for animals of the bovine species, and for sheep and goats, are occasionally rendered *cattle*, as is also the word *behemah*, which means *beast* in general. Cattle, therefore, in the Old Testament, include varieties

of oxen, bullocks, heifers, goats, sheep, and even asses, camels, and horses. (Cf. Gen. 13:2, Exo. 34:19, Lev. 1:2, Num. 32:1-5, 1 Ki. 1:19, Psa. 50:10, etc.).

3. *Jacob at Shechem*, vv. 18-20

18 *And Jacob came in peace to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram; and encamped before the city.* 19 *And he bought the parcel of ground, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for a hundred pieces of money.* 20 *And he erected there an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.*

From Succoth, after an indeterminable length of time, Jacob crossed a ford of the Jordan and *came in peace "to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan."* He came in peace: "lit. 'whole' in body, having been healed of his limping; whole financially and in his learning, having forgotten nothing of it in Laban's house (Rashi)" (SC, 204). What Jacob had asked for in his vow at Bethel (28:21), prior to his departure from Canaan, was now fulfilled. He had returned in safety "to the land of Canaan." "Succoth, therefore, did not belong to the land of Canaan, but must have been on the eastern side of the Jordan" (K-D, 311).

Jacob came to *the city of Shechem*: "so called from Shechem, the son of the Hivite prince Hamor, v. 19, 34:2ff" (K-D). "But most writers, following the Septuagint, take Shalem as a proper name—a city of (prince) Shechem (cf. ch. 34, Judg. 9:28)" (Jamieson). (Cf. marginal rendering, A.S.V., *to Shalem, a city*). There seems very good reason, however, for the view that the original word was adjectival (not a proper name meaning *to Shalem*) signifying, *safe, peaceful*, hence enforcing the twofold reference to Jacob's return *in peace* (v. 18. cf. 28:21). Gen. 12:6 seems to indicate that the city of

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Shechem was not known in Abraham's time; we may conclude that Hamor founded it and called it by the name of his son. In the allocation of the land to the twelve tribes, Shechem fell to Ephraim (Josh. 20:7), but was assigned to the Levites and became a city of refuge (Josh. 21:20-21). It was the scene of the promulgation of the law, when its blessings were announced from Gerizim and its curses from Ebal (Deut. 27:11 ff., Josh. 8:33-35). It was here that Joshua assembled the people just before his death and delivered his "farewell address" (Josh. 24:1-25). The later history of the site is closely associated with the Samaritans and their sacred mount, Gerizim. The memory of Jacob's abode there is preserved by "Jacob's Well" at Sychar (John 4:1-26): the ruins of Shechem itself have been unearthed by archeologists, at the east end of the pass between Ebal and Gerizim. Sychar is called "Shechem" in the old Syriac Gospels. (See UBD, HBD).

Jacob pitched his tent before the town, that is, to the east of it. The population of Canaan apparently had risen greatly in numbers, as in the social scale, from the time Abraham had fed his flocks on the free, unoccupied pasture land (or "place of Shechem," 12:6). In Jacob's day a city had been built on the spot, and the adjoining grounds was private property, a segment of which he had to purchase for the site of his encampment. He bought this piece of ground from the sons of Hamor for 100 *Kesita*—a coin stamped with the figure of a lamb; it has been supposed from 23:15, 16, that the *kesitah* was equivalent to four shekels. It is uncertain, however, whether this was its actual value in Canaan in Jacob's time. (The transliteration here is *kesitah*; the translation is "piece of money"; cf. Job 42:11). In all likelihood it was "an ingot of precious metal of recognized value. The LXX of Gen. 33:19 renders it 'lamb'. In the ancient Middle East precious metals carved in animal shapes were used

in various sizes for standard weights and as currency" (HBD, s.v.). The circulation of coined money, however, is another proof of the early progress of the Canaanites in social and cultural advancement. This purchase undoubtedly shows us that Jacob, relying on God's promise, regarded Canaan as his own home and as the home of his seed. Was it not in this field that he afterward sank a well (cf. John 4:6)? "This piece of field, which fell to the lot of the sons of Joseph, and where Joseph's bones were buried (Josh. 24:32), was, according to tradition, the plain which stretches out at the southeastern opening of the valley of Shechem, where Jacob's well is still pointed out (John 4:6), also Joseph's grave, a Mahometan wely (grave) two or three hundred paces to the north" (K-D, 311). (It is interesting to note the over-all correspondence between Abraham's purchase of a field and cave from "the children of Heth" and Jacob's purchase of a field from "the children of Hamor": Gen. 23:16, 33:19). (The student will find the echoes of this narrative of Jacob at Shechem in Gen. 49:5-7, especially with respect to the deeds of Simeon and Levi, as reported in ch. 34). (Note also the reference in this story to Hamor as a *Hivite*; cf. Gen. 10:17. "Probably, however, we should read with the Greek 'Horite,' one of an enclave of non-semitic, uncircumcised groups from the north, Deut. 2:12ff." (JB, 55). These names, Horites, Philistines, Amorites, Arameans, Canaanites, etc., are used with considerable license throughout the Pentateuch.)

Finally, we read that Jacob *erected there* (i.e., on his field in the vicinity of Shechem) an *altar* (as Abraham had done previously after his entrance into Canaan 12:7), and called it *El-Elohe-Israel* (*God, the mighty, is the God of Israel*). That is, he named it with this name or he dedicated it to *El-Elohe-Israel*. "Delitzsch views this title as a kind of superscription. But Jacob's conse-

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cration means more than that his God is not a mere imaginary deity; it means, further, that he has proved himself actually to be God (God is the God of Israel); God in the clear, definite form *El, the Mighty, is the God of Israel, the wrestler with God*. Israel had experienced both, in the almighty protection which his God had shown him from Bethel throughout his journeyings, and in the wrestlings with him, and learned his might. In the Mosaic period the expression, Jehovah, the God of Israel, takes its place (Exo. 34:23). 'The chosen name of God in the book of Joshua' (Delitzsch)" (Lange, 560). "The name of the altar embraces, and stamps upon the memory of the world, the result of the past of Jacob's life, and the experiences through which Jacob had become Israel" (Gosman, in Lange, 560).

The purchase of the ground is referred to in Joshua 24:32 in the story of Joseph's burial. "It is significant that Israel's claim to the grave of Joseph is based on purchase, just as its right to that of Abraham, ch. 23," writes Skinner (ICCG, 416): in this statement, of course, *Israel* is used as the name of the nation. This tendency on the part of the earlier critics to identify these names of the patriarchs as being in reality the names of the various peoples or tribes which the patriarchs sired, has been pretty generally exploded by present-day archaeological discoveries; the same is true of the critical presupposition that in all cases in which an altar is said to have been erected by one of the patriarchs, it was in reality a stone pillar (*matstsebah*) that was set up and regarded as the abode of a tutelary deity. The fact is that the patriarchal altars were preeminently places of sacrifice, hence used for the worship of the living and true God of Hebrew revelation (12:8, 13:18, 22:9, etc.) The patriarchal altar was the place of communion with God who, in the sacrifice, was approached with a gift. These altars in several

instances took on the nature of memorials. Though probably made of earth originally, the law of Moses allowed, as an alternative, the use of unhewn stone (Exo. 20:24-25).

"*El-elohé-Israel*. This does not mean that the altar was called 'the God of Israel,' but that he gave it a name which commemorated the fact that the miracles were wrought for him by Israel's (Jacob's) God. Similarly, we find Moses calling an altar *Adonai-nissi* ('the Lord is my banner,' Exod. 17:15), which likewise does not mean that the altar bore that name, but it testified that 'the Lord is my (Moses') banner,' in praise of Him (Rashi). Nachmanides cites Rashi with approval, and draws attention to such names as Zuriel, Zurishaddai, which also honor God, as they signify, 'God is my Rock,' 'The Almighty is my Rock.' Sforzo explains that, in his prayer, Jacob called Him *His* God, employing his changed name, Israel" (SC, 204).

"After the example of Abraham (12:8) as he entered the land, Jacob also builds an altar unto the Lord. The name of the altar embodies the sum of Jacob's spiritual experience, which he sought to transfer to coming generations. So he gives the altar a name which is in itself a statement to the effect that 'the God of Israel' is an '*el*, i.e., 'a Strong One,' i.e., 'a mighty God.' Jacob is remembering God's promise, and God has in an outstanding way proved Himself a God well able to keep His promises. The common name for God, '*el*,' covers this thought. By the use of his own name, 'Israel,' Jacob indicates that the restored, new man within him was the one that understood this newly acquired truth concerning God. We believe those to be in the wrong who assume that while Jacob was in Paddan-aram he lapsed into the idolatrous ways of men like Laban and so practically forsook the God of his fathers. Nothing points in that direction.

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The meager evidence available rather points to a fidelity on Jacob's part, which, though it was not of the strong ethical fibre as was that of Abraham, yet kept him from apostasy. Since it stood in need also of some measure of purification, God took Jacob in hand, especially at Peniel, and raised his faith-life to a higher level" (Leupold, EG, 895).

"Abraham had, on his landing on the same spot in Canaan, erected an altar; and now Jacob, on his arrival from Paddan-aram, imitates the example of his grandfather from special reasons of his own (cf. 27:21, last clause, with 22:28, 29). Whether, on its erection, it was dedicated with the formal bestowment of a name which, according to patriarchal usage, would perpetuate the purpose of the monument, or it was furnished with an inscription, we are not informed. The Septuagint omits the name. But it was a beautiful proof of his personal piety, a most suitable conclusion to his journey, and a lasting memorial of a distinguished favour, to raise an altar to 'God, the God of Israel.' *Wherever we pitch a tent, 'God should have an altar'*" (Jamieson, CECG, 219; italics mine—CC).

FOR MEDITATION AND SERMONIZING

Jacob's Wrestlings

The following comments by Morgenstern (JIBG) are excellent: "Then follows an anxious night. Redoubled preparations were made to meet Esau in the morning. Jacob sent his wives and children across the stream hoping their helplessness might touch Esau's heart. Jacob remained on this side of the stream. He would cross only at the last moment. Possibly he would turn back and flee, without sheep and cattle, wives and children, to hinder his escape. But there was no place for him to go. Such was Jacob's guilt-laden mind. . . . Someone wrestled with him all night long. The Bible calls it a *man*. Tradition has come to call it an angel (Hosea 12:5). . . . Was it Jacob's other self: his wicked, selfish earthly nature, with which he strove all night long? . . . Man is still a child of two worlds, Gen. 2:7. His body is of dust, but his spirit is the Breath of God, inbreathed by God Himself. For twenty years these two natures had striven with each other. This struggle is typical. . . . There is no assurance that good will triumph of itself. It must be supported by strength of will and determination for the right, which endure

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for all time and under all circumstances. Men become changed, blessed by the very evil powers with which they have striven. No longer the old Jacob, but now the new Israel. Yet man never remains unscathed. . . . Victory over evil is never gained in the darkness of the night. So with the dawn Jacob became a new man, with an appropriate new name, 'The Champion of God.' Then he crossed the river."

* * * * *

"To prayer he [Jacob] adds prudence, and sends forward present after present that their reiteration might win his brother's heart. This done, he rested for the night; but rising up before the day, he sent forward his wives and children across the ford of the Jabbok, remaining for a while in solitude to prepare his mind for the trial of the day. It was then that 'a man' appeared and wrestled with him till the morning rose. This 'man' was the 'Angel Jehovah,' and the conflict was a repetition in *act* of the prayer which we have already seen Jacob offering in *words*. This is clearly stated by the prophet Hosea: '*By his strength he had power with God; yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him*' (Hosea 12:3-4). Though taught his own weakness by the dislocation of his thigh at the angel's touch, he gained the victory by his importunity—'*I will not let thee go except thou bless me*'—and he received the new name of ISRAEL (*he who strives with God, and prevails*), as a sign that 'he had prevailed with God, and should therefore prevail with man' (Gen. 32:28). Well knowing with whom he had dealt he called the place Peniel (*the face of God*). '*for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved*.' The memory of his lameness, which he seems to have carried with him to his grave (Gen. 32:31), was preserved by the custom of the Israelites not to eat of the sinew in the hollow of the thigh. Its moral significance is beautifully expressed by Wesley:

'Contented now, upon my thigh
I halt till life's short journey end;
All helplessness, all weaknesses, I
On Thee alone for strength depend;
Nor have I power from Thee to move,
Thy nature and thy name is Love.'

(OTH, 103).

* * * * *

"Dividing all his possessions at the River Jabbok in preparation for meeting Esau, he [Jacob] turned to God in prayer. He humbly acknowledged that he was unworthy of all the blessings that God had bestowed upon him. But in the face of danger he pleaded for deliverance. During the loneliness of the night he wrestled with a man. In this strange experience, which he recognized as a divine encounter, his name was changed from 'Jacob' to 'Israel.' Thereafter Jacob was not the deceiver; instead he was subjected to deception and grief by his own sons" (OTS, 37).

* * * * *

"This remarkable occurrence is not to be regarded as a dream or an internal vision, but fell within the sphere of sensuous perception. At the same time, it was not a natural or corporeal wrestling, but a real conflict of both mind and body, a work of the spirit with intense effort of the body' (*Delitzsch*), in which Jacob was lifted

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up into a highly elevated condition of body and mind resembling that of ecstasy, through the medium of the manifestation of God. In a merely outward conflict, it is impossible to conquer through prayer and tears. As the idea of a dream or vision has no point of contact in the history; so the notion, that the outward conflict of bodily wrestling, and the spiritual conflict with prayer and tears, are two features opposed to one another and spiritually distinct, is evidently at variance with the meaning of the narrative and the interpretation of the prophet Hosea. Since Jacob still continued his resistance, even after his hip had been put out of joint, and would not let Him go till He had blessed him, it cannot be said that it was not till all hope of maintaining the conflict by bodily strength was taken from him, that he had recourse to the weapon of prayer. And when Hosea (12:4, 5) points his contemporaries to their wrestling forefather as an example for their imitation, in these words, 'He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and in his human strength he fought with God; and he fought with the Angel and prevailed; he wept and made supplication unto Him,' the turn by which the explanatory periphrasis of Jacob's words, 'I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me,' is linked on to the previous clause . . . without a copula or *vav consec.*, is a proof that the prophet did not regard the weeping and supplication as occurring after the wrestling, or as only a second element, which was subsequently added to the corporeal struggle. Hosea evidently looked upon the weeping and supplication as the distinguishing feature in the conflict, without thereby excluding the corporeal wrestling. At the same time, by connecting this event with what took place at the birth of the twins (25:26), the prophet teaches that Jacob merely completed, by his wrestling with God, what he had already been engaged in even from his mother's womb, viz. his striving for the birthright; in other words, for the possession of the covenant promise and the covenant blessing. This meaning is also indicated by the circumstances under which the event took place. Jacob had wrested the blessing of the birthright from his brother Esau; but it was by cunning and deceit, and he had been obliged to flee from his wrath in consequence. And now that he desired to return to the land of promise and his father's house, and to enter upon the inheritance promised him in his father's blessing, Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men which filled him with great alarm. As he felt too weak to enter upon a conflict with him, he prayed to the covenant God for deliverance from the hand of his brother, and the fulfilment of the covenant promises. The answer of God to this prayer was the present wrestling with God, in which he was victorious indeed, but not without carrying the marks of it all his life long in the dislocation of his thigh. Jacob's great fear of Esau's wrath and vengeance, which he could not suppress notwithstanding the divine revelations at Bethel and Mahanaim, had its foundation in his willful and treacherous appropriation of a blessing of the firstborn. To save him from the hand of his brother, it was necessary that God should first meet him as an enemy, and show him that his real opponent was God Himself, and that he must first of all overcome Him before he could hope to overcome his brother. And Jacob overcame God; not with power of the flesh however, with which he had hitherto wrestled for God against man (God convinced him of that by touching his hip, so that it was put out of joint), but by the power of faith and prayer, reaching by firm hold of God even to the point of being

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blessed, by which he proved himself to be a true wrestler of God, who fought with God and with men, *i.e.*, who by his wrestling with God overcame men as well. And whilst by the dislocation of his hip the carnal nature of his previous wrestling was declared to be powerless and wrong, he received in the new name of *Israel* the prize of victory, and at the same time directions from God how he was henceforth to strive for the cause of the Lord.—By his wrestling with God, Jacob entered upon a new stage in his life. As a sign of this, he received a new name, which indicated, as the result of this conflict, the nature of his new relation to God. But whilst Abram and Sarai, from the time when God changed their names (17:5 and 15), are always called by their new names; in the history of Jacob we find the old name used interchangeably with the new. 'For the former two names denoted a change into a new, and permanent position, effected and intended by the will and promise of God; consequently the old names were entirely abolished. But the name *Israel* denoted a spiritual state determined by faith; and in Jacob's life the natural state, determined by flesh and blood, still continued to stand side by side with this. Jacob's new name was transmitted to his descendants, however, who were called *Israel* as the covenant nation. For as the blessing of their forefather's conflict came down to them as a spiritual inheritance, so did they also enter upon the duty of preserving this inheritance by continuing in a similar conflict.'

Ver. 31. The remembrance of this wonderful conflict Jacob perpetuated in the name which he gave to the place where it had occurred, viz. *Pniel* or *Pnuel* . . . because there he had seen Elohim face to face, and his soul had been delivered (from death, 16:13).—Vers. 32, 33. With the rising of the sun after the night of his conflict, the night of anguish and fear also passed away from Jacob's mind, so that he was able to leave Pnuel in comfort, and go forward on his journey. The dislocation of the thigh alone remained. For this reason the children of Israel are accustomed to avoid eating the *nervus ischiadicus*, the principal nerve in the neighborhood of the hip, which is easily injured by any violent strain in wrestling. '*Unto this day*': the remark is applicable still" (K-D, 305-307).

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"Jacob seems to have gone through the principles or foundations of faith in God and repentance towards him, which gave a character to the history of his grandfather and father, and to have entered upon the stage of spontaneous action. He had that inward feeling of spiritual power which prompted the apostle to say, 'I can do all things.' Hence we find him dealing with Esau for the birthright, plotting with his mother for the blessing, erecting a pillar and vowing a vow at Bethel, overcoming Laban with his own weapons, and even now taking the most prudent measures for securing a welcome from Esau on his return. He relied indeed on God, as was demonstrated in many of his words and deeds; but the prominent feature of his character was a strong and firm reliance on himself. But this practical selfreliance, though naturally springing up in the new man and highly commendable in itself, was not yet in Jacob duly subordinated to that absolute reliance which ought to be placed in the Author of our being and our salvation. Hence he had been betrayed into intrusive, dubious, and even sinister courses, which in the retributive providence of God had brought, and were yet to bring him, into many troubles and

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preplexities. The hazard of his present situation arose chiefly from his former unjustifiable practices towards his brother. He is now to learn the lesson of unreserved reliance on God.

"A man appeared to him in his loneliness; one having the bodily form and substance of a man. *Wrestled with him*,—encountered him in the very point in which he was strong. He had been a taker by the heel from his very birth (25:26), and his subsequent life had been a constant and successful struggle with adversaries. *And when he, the stranger, saw that he prevailed not over him*: Jacob, true to his character, struggles while life remains, with this new combatant. *He touched the socket of his thigh*, so that it was wrenched out of joint. The thigh is the pillar of a man's strength, and its joint with the hip the seat of physical force for the wrestler. Let the thigh bone be thrown out of joint, and the man is utterly disabled. Jacob now finds that this mysterious wrestler has wrested from him, by one touch, all his might, and he can no longer stand alone. Without any support whatever from himself, he hangs upon the conqueror, and in that condition learns by experience the practice of sole reliance on one mightier than himself. This is the turning-point in this strange drama. Henceforth Jacob now feels himself strong, not in himself, but in the Lord, and in the power of his might. What follows is merely the explication and the consequence of this bodily conflict.

"*And he, the Mighty Stranger, said, Let me go, for the dawn ariseth.* The time for other avocations is come: let me go. He does not shake off the clinging grasp of the now disabled Jacob, but only calls upon him to relax his grasp. *And he, Jacob, said, I will not let thee go except thou bless me.* Despairing now of his own strength, he is Jacob still: he declares his determination to cling on until his conqueror bless him. He now knows he is in the hand of a higher power, who can disable and again enable, who can curse and also bless. He knows himself also to be now utterly helpless without the healing, quickening, protecting power of his victor, and, though he die in the effort, he will not let him go without receiving this blessing. Jacob's sense of his total debility and utter defeat is now the secret of his power with his friendly vanquisher. He can overthrow all the prowess of the self-reliant, but he cannot resist the earnest entreaty of the helpless.

"28-30. *What is thy name?* He reminds him of his former self, Jacob, the supplanter, the self-reliant, self-seeking. But now he is disabled, dependent on another, and seeking a blessing from another, and for all others as well as himself. No more Jacob shall thy name be called, but Israel,—a prince of God, in God, with God. In a personal conflict, depending on thyself, thou wert no match for God. But in prayer, depending on another, thou hast prevailed with God and with men. The new name is indicative of the new nature which has now come to its perfection of development in Jacob. Unlike Abraham, who received his new name once for all, and was never afterwards called by the former one, Jacob will hence be called now by the one and now by the other, as the occasion may serve. For he was called from the womb (25:23), and both names have a spiritual significance for two different aspects of the child of God, according to the apostle's paradox, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure' (Phil. 2:12, 13). *Tell now thy name.* Disclose to me thy nature. This mysterious Being intimates by his reply

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that Jacob was to learn his nature, so far as he yet required to know it, from the event that had just occurred; and he was well acquainted with his name. *And he blessed him there.* He had the power of disabling the self-sufficient creature, of upholding that creature when unable to stand, of answering prayer, of conferring a new name, with a new phase of spiritual life, and of blessing with a bodily renovation, and with spiritual capacity for being a blessing to mankind. After all this, Jacob could not any longer doubt who he was. There are, then, three acts in this dramatic scene: *first*, Jacob wrestling with the Omnipresent in the form of a man, in which he is signally defeated; *second*, Jacob importunately supplicating Jehovah, in which he prevails as a prince of God; *third*, Jacob receiving the blessing of a new name, a new development of spiritual life, and a new capacity for bodily action.

"We have also already noted the divine method of dealing with man. He proceeds from the known to the unknown, from the simple to the complex, from the material to the spiritual, from the sensible to the super-sensible. So must he do, until he have to deal with a world of philosophers. And even then, and only then, will his method of teaching and dealing with men be clearly and fully understood. The more we advance in the philosophy of spiritual things, the more delight will we feel in discerning the marvellous analogy and intimate nearness of the outward to the inward, and the material to the spiritual world. We have only to bear in mind that in man there is a spirit as well as a body; and in this outward wrestling of man with man we have a token of the inward wrestling of spirit with spirit, and therefore an experimental instance of that great conflict of the Infinite Being with the finite self, which grace has introduced into our fallen world, recorded here for the spiritual edification of the church on earth.

"My life is preserved. The feeling of conscience is, that no sinner can see the infinitely holy God and live. *And he halted upon his thigh.* The wrenching of the tendons and muscles was mercifully healed, yet so as to leave a permanent monument, in Jacob's halting gait, that God had overcome his self-will" (Murphy, MG, 412-415).

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"24-25. The Struggle in the Dark.—Who was the antagonist coming out of the darkness to seize Jacob for a struggle that would last *until the breaking of the day*? Not Esau, as in the first fearful moment of surprise Jacob might have imagined. Not any human foe, however terrible. Not a river-god. No; but the Almighty God of Righteousness, forcing him to make his reckoning. The O.T. story is dramatizing here the consequence that comes to every soul that has tried too long to evade the truth about itself. Thus far Jacob's life had seemed successful. By one stratagem and another he had outwitted Esau, Isaac, and Laban. Coming home prosperous, all the outward circumstances might have made him boastful. But his conscience saw something else. He saw his world shadowed by his guilt. Old memories awakened, old fears rose up from the past in which he had tried to bury them. He had to face these memories and submit to their bruising recollection. Now that he was to meet Esau, he knew that he was not the masterful person he had liked to imagine he was. He had made his smooth way ahead among people who had not known him;

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now he had to encounter people who had known him, and would remember him as a liar and a coward. He was brought up short to a reckoning with himself, which was a reckoning with God. He could ignore the prospect of that in the busy daytime, but now it was night, and he was alone; and when a man is alone, then least of all can he get away from God. When the mysterious antagonist touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, *and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint*, it was a symbol of the fact that Jacob was in the grip of a power which his self-assurance could not match. Jacob knew that henceforth he could never walk in lofty arrogance again.

"V. 26, *Holding On*.—Another strange mingling of elements is in the picture here. The exclamation of the unnamed wrestler, *Let me go, for the day breaketh* seems to have its origin in the dim old belief that spirits could walk the earth only during the darkness, and that when the day began to break they had to go back to the place of shadows from which they had come. But the timeless meaning is in the words of Jacob, *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me*. In the good and evil that made up Jacob there were two factors of nobility that saved him. The first was his awareness that life has a divine meaning above its material fact—the awareness that made him seek the birthright and made possible his vision at Bethel. The second quality, revealed here in his wrestling, was his determination. He had struggled all night until he was lame and agonized; but when his antagonist wished to separate himself, Jacob desperately held on. When a man is forced to wrestle with moral reality and its consequences, he may try to get rid of them as quickly as he can. But Jacob's quality was otherwise. Caught in the grip of judgment, his prevailing desire was not for escape. He would hold on until something decisive happened. In punishment and in prosperity, he would not let the experience go until he had wrung a blessing from it. The shallow man may ignore his sins; the cowardly man may try to evade their consequences; but Jacob now was neither one. Hurt and humiliated though he was, and needing to repent, he still dared believe that his great desire could prevail. In Charles Wesley's hymn one can hear his cry:

'Yield to me now, for I am weak,
But confident in self-despair;
Speak to my heart, in blessing speak;
Be conquered by my instant prayer.'

Frederick W. Robertson has given a further interpretation to Jacob's answer to the demand of his antagonist, *Let me go*: 'Jacob held Him more convulsively fast, as if aware that the daylight was likely to rob him of his anticipated blessing: in which there seems concealed a very deep truth. God is approached more nearly in that which is indefinite than in that which is definite and distinct. He is felt in awe, and wonder and worship, rather than in clear conceptions. There is a sense in which darkness has more of God than light has. . . . In sorrow, haunted by uncertain presentiments, we feel the infinite around us. The gloom disperses, the world's joy comes again, and it seems as if God were gone—the Being who had touched us with a withering hand, and wrestled with us, yet whose presence, even when most terrible, was more blessed than His absence. . . . Yes, in solitary, silent, vague darkness, the Awful One is near'" (Bowie, IBG, 723-724). (The

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quotation is from Robertson, *Sermons on Bible Subjects*, 17, 18). (Recall in this connection Gen. 28:16-17).

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When the messengers brought back to Jacob the news that Esau was approaching with a force of four hundred men, "Jacob's first thought was, as always, *a plan*, and in this we have a true picture of the poor human heart. True, he turns to God after he makes his plan, and cries to Him for deliverance; but no sooner does he cease praying than he resumes the planning. Now, praying and planning will never do together. If I plan, I am leaning more or less on my plan; but when I pray, I should lean exclusively upon God. Hence, the two things are perfectly incompatible—they virtually destroy each other. When my eye is filled with my own management of things, I am not prepared to see God acting for me; and, in that case, prayer is not the utterance of my need, but the mere superstitious performance of something which I think ought to be done, or it may be, asking God to sanctify my plans. This will never do. It is not asking God to sanctify and bless my means, but it is asking Him to do it all Himself. (No doubt, when faith allows God to act, He will use His own agency; but this is a totally different thing from His owning and blessing the plans and arrangements of unbelief and impatience. This distinction is not sufficiently understood.)

"Though Jacob asked God to deliver him from his brother Esau, he evidently was not satisfied with that, and therefore he tried to 'appease him with a present.' Thus his confidence was in the 'present,' and not entirely in God. 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.' It is often hard to detect what is the real ground of the heart's confidence. We imagine, or would fain persuade ourselves, that we are leaning upon God, when we are, in reality, leaning upon some scheme of our own devising. Who, after hearkening to Jacob's prayer, wherein he says, 'Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother—from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children,' could imagine him saying, 'I will appease him with a present.' Had he forgotten his prayer? Was he making a god of this present? Did he place more confidence in a few cattle than in Jehovah, to whom he had just been committing himself? These are questions which naturally arise out of Jacob's actions in reference to Esau, and we can readily answer them by looking into the glass of our own hearts. There we learn, as well as on the page of Jacob's history, how much more apt we are to lean on our own management than on God; but it will not do; we must be brought to see the end of our management, that it is perfect folly, and that the true path of wisdom is to repose in full confidence upon God.

"Nor will it do to make our prayers part of our management. We often feel very well satisfied with ourselves when we add prayer to our arrangement, or when we have used all lawful means, and called upon God to bless them. When this is the case, our prayers are worth about as much as our plans, inasmuch as we are leaning upon them instead of upon God. We must really be brought to the end of everything with which self has aught to do; for until then, God cannot show Himself. But we can never get to the end of our plans until we have been brought to the end of ourselves. We must see that 'all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof

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is as the flower of the field' (Isa. 40:6). [Cf. also Psa. 90:5, 6; Jas. 1:9-11].

"Thus it is in this interesting chapter: when Jacob had made all his prudent arrangements, we read, 'And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.' This is the turning-point in the history of this very remarkable man. To be left alone with God is the only true way of arriving at a just knowledge of ourselves and our ways. We can never get a true estimate of nature and all its actings until we have weighed them in the balance of the sanctuary, and there we ascertain their real worth. No matter what we may think about ourselves, nor yet what men may think about us; the great question is, What does God think about us? and the answer to this question can only be heard when we are 'left alone.' Away from the world; away from self; away from all the thoughts, reasonings, imaginations, and emotions of mere nature, and 'alone' with God; thus, and thus alone, can we get a correct judgment about ourselves.

"Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him.' Mark, *it was not Jacob wrestling with a man, but a man wrestling with Jacob.* This scene is very commonly referred to as an instance of Jacob's power in prayer. That it is not this is evident from the simple wording of the passage. My wrestling with a man, and a man wrestling with me, present two totally different ideas to the mind. In the former case, I want to gain some object from him; in the latter, he wants to gain some object from me. Now, in Jacob's case, the divine object was to bring him to see what a poor, feeble, worthless creature he was; and when Jacob pertinaciously held out against the divine dealing with him, 'He touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as He wrestled with him.' The sentence of death must be written on the flesh—the power of the cross must be entered into before we can steadily and happily walk with God. We have followed Jacob so far, amid all the windings and workings of his extraordinary character—we have seen him planning and managing during his twenty years' sojourning with Laban; but not until he 'was left alone' did he get a true idea of what a perfectly helpless thing he was in himself. Then, the seat of his strength being touched, he learnt to say, 'I will not let Thee go.'

'Other refuge have I none;
Clings my helpless soul to Thee.'

This was a new era in the history of the supplanting, planning Jacob. Up to this point he had held fast to his own ways and means; but now he is brought to say, 'I will not let Thee go.' Now, let my reader remark, that Jacob did not express himself thus 'until the hollow of his thigh was touched.' This simple fact is quite sufficient to settle the true interpretation of the whole scene. God was wrestling with Jacob to bring him to this point. We have already seen that, as to Jacob's power in prayer, he had no sooner uttered a few words to God than he let out the real secret of his soul's dependence, by saying, 'I will appease him (Esau) with a present'. Would he have said this if he had really entered into the meaning of prayer, or true dependence on God? Assuredly not. If he had been looking to God alone to appease Esau, could he have said, 'I will appease him with a present'? Impossible. God and the creature must be kept distinct, and will be kept so in every soul that knows much of the sacred reality of a life of faith.

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"But, alas! here is where we fail (if one may speak for another). Under the plausible and apparently pious formula of using means, we really cloke the positive infidelity of our poor deceitful hearts; we think we are looking to God to bless our means, while, in reality, we are shutting Him out by leaning on the means instead of leaning on Him. Oh! may our hearts be taught the evil of thus acting. May we learn to cling more simply to God *alone*, that so our history may be more characterized by that holy elevation above the circumstances through which we are passing. It is not, by any means, any easy matter so to get to the end of the creature, in every shape and form, so as to be able to say, 'I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me.' To say this from the heart, and to abide in the power of it, is the secret of all true strength. Jacob said it when the power of his thigh was touched; but not till then. He struggled long, ere he gave way, because his confidence in the flesh was strong. But God can bring down to the dust the stoutest character. He knows how to touch the spring of nature's strength, and write the sentence of death thoroughly upon it; and until this is done, there can be no real 'power' with God or man. We must be 'weak' ere we can be 'strong.' 'The power of Christ' can only 'rest on us' in connection with the knowledge of our infirmities. Christ cannot put the seal of His approval upon nature's strength, its wisdom, or its glory: all these must sink that He may rise. Nature can never form, in any one way, a pedestal on which to display the grace or power of Christ; for if it could, then might flesh glory in His presence; but this, we know, can never be.

"And inasmuch as the display of God's glory and God's name or character is connected with the entire setting aside of nature, so, until this latter is set aside, the soul can never enjoy the disclosure of the former. Hence, though Jacob is called to tell out his name—to own that his name is 'Jacob,' or a 'supplanter,' he yet receives no revelation of the name of Him who had been wrestling with him, and bringing him down into the dust. He received for himself the name of 'Israel,' or 'prince,' which was a great step in advance; but when he says, 'Tell me, I pray, Thy name,' he received the reply, 'Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after My name?' The Lord refuses to tell His name, though He had elicited from Jacob the truth as to himself, and He blesses him accordingly. How often is this the case in the annals of God's family! There is the disclosure of self in all its moral deformity; but we fail to get hold practically of what God is, though He has come so very close to us, and blessed us, too, in connection with the discovery of ourselves. Jacob received the new name of 'Israel' when the hollow of his thigh had been touched—he became a mighty 'prince' when he had been brought to know himself as a weak man; but still the Lord had to say, 'Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after My name?' There is no disclosure of the name of Him who, nevertheless, had brought the real name and condition of Jacob.

"From all this we learn that it is one thing to be blessed by the Lord, and quite another thing to have the revelation of His character, by the Spirit, to our hearts. 'He blessed him there,' but He did not tell His name. There is blessing in being brought, in any measure, to know ourselves; for therein we are lead into a path in which we are able more clearly to discern what God is to us in detail. Thus it was with Jacob. When the hollow of his thigh was touched, *he found himself in a condition in which it*

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was either God or nothing. A poor halting man could do little, it therefore behooved him to cling to one who was almighty.

"I would remark . . . that the book of Job is, in a certain sense, a detailed commentary on this scene in Jacob's history. Throughout the first thirty-one chapters, Job grapples with his friends, and maintains his point against all their arguments; but in chapter 32, God, by the instrumentality of Elihu, begins to wrestle with him; and in chapter 38, He comes down upon him directly with all the majesty of His power, overwhelms him by the display of His greatness and glory, and elicits from him the well-known words, 'I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes' (ch. 42:5, 6). This was really touching the hollow of his thigh. And mark the expression, 'Mine eye seeth Thee.' He does not say, 'I see myself' merely; no; but 'Thee.' Nothing but a view of what God is can really lead to repentance and self-loathing. Thus it will be with the people of Israel, whose history is very analogous with that of Job. When they shall look upon Him whom they have pierced, they will mourn, and then there will be full restoration and blessing. Their latter end, like Job's, will be better than their beginning. They will learn the full meaning of that word, 'O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help' " (Hosea 13:9)" ("C.H.M.," NG, 297-304).

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"We must not pass from these scenes in Jacob's history without noticing the admirable tact with which he appeased his justly-offended brother. He sends an embassy to him from a long distance. This itself was a compliment, and, no doubt, the ambassadors were the most respectable he could command. Then the *terms* of the message were the best possible to flatter and conciliate an Oriental. He calls Esau his *lord*, himself his servant—or *slave*, as it might be rendered; and he thus tacitly, and without alluding to the old trick by which he cheated him of his birthright, acknowledges him to be the elder brother, and his superior. At the same time, by the large presents, and the exhibition of great wealth, Esau is led to infer that he is not returning a needy adventurer to claim a double portion of the paternal estate; and it would not be unoriental if there was intended to be conveyed by all this a sly intimation that Jacob was neither to be despised nor lightly meddled with. There was subtle flattery mingled with profound humility, but backed all the while by the quiet allusion to the substantial position of one whom *God had greatly blessed and prospered*. All this, however, failed, and the enraged brother set out to meet him with an army. Jacob was terribly alarmed; but, with his usual skill and presence of mind, he made another effort to appease Esau. The presents were well selected, admirably arranged, and sent forward one after another; and the drivers were directed to address Esau in the most respectful and humble terms: 'They be thy *servant* Jacob's, a present unto my *lord* Esau; and be sure to say, Behold thy *servant* Jacob is behind us; for he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face.' Jacob did not miscalculate the influence of his princely offerings, and I verily believe there is not an emeer or sheikh in all Gilead at this day who would not be appeased by such presents; and, from my personal knowledge of Orientals, I should say that Jacob need not have been in such great terror, following in their rear. Far less will now 'make room,' as Solomon says, for any offender, however atrocious, and bring him before great men with acceptance.

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"Esau was mollified, and when near enough to see the lowly prostrations of his trembling brother, forgot everything but that he was Jacob, the son of his mother, the companion of his childhood. He ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him; *and they wept*. All this is beautiful, natural, Oriental; and so is their subsequent discourse. . . . It was obviously the purpose of God to bring his chosen servant into these terrible trials, in order to work the deeper conviction of his former sin, and the more thorough repentance and reformation. And here it is that Jacob appears as a guide and model to all mankind. In his utmost distress and alarm, he holds fast his hope and trust in God, wrestles with Him in mighty supplication, and as a prince prevails: 'I will not let thee go except thou bless me. And he said, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. 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. 32:24, 27, 28)" (Thomson, LB, 371-372).

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON PART FORTY-TWO

1. What conditions prompted Jacob to take to flight from Paddan-aram?
2. What attitude did his wives take toward their father? What accusations did they bring against him?
3. Of what did Jacob's entire retinue ("household") consist?
4. What route did he take from Paddan-aram? What and where was Gilead?
5. In consulting his wives about his proposed flight, what charges did he bring against Laban?
6. What was the dream he reported to have experienced himself?
7. Would you agree with the view that this dream was the product of an "excited imagination"? Explain your answer.
8. Would you agree with the interpretation of Delitzsch, or with that of Kurtz, of Jacob's reported dream? Explain your answer.
9. Is there any Scripture support for the notion that increase of material goods is an unfailing concomitant of religious steadfastness? Explain your answer.

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10. Does God guarantee the obedient believer, in Scripture, any material good beyond "bread to eat and raiment to put on" (28:20)? Justify your answer.
11. What was (or were) the teraphim which Rachel stole on leaving her father?
12. What are some of the suggestions offered to explain why Rachel stole the teraphim? State which seems the most reasonable to you and why.
13. For what purposes were such objects used as indicated elsewhere in the Old Testament?
14. In what respect did the teraphim probably have legal significance for Laban?
15. Would you agree that Rachel "stole" the teraphim? Explain your answer.
16. Are we justified in thinking that Laban had lapsed into a more corrupt form of religion and that his daughters had not "escaped the infection"?
17. Is there any ground on which we can excuse or justify Rachel's sin?
18. What other evidence do we have that Abraham's kinsmen in the region of Haran had drifted into idolatry?
19. What information regarding such objects do we obtain from the Nuzi records?
20. Do we find intimations that Jacob himself was not immunized against this form of idolatry? Explain your answer.
21. What device did Rachel use to prevent Laban's finding the teraphim in her tent?
22. What special support did Jacob give Laban in authorizing the latter to search the tents occupied by members of his own household?
23. What evidence do we have that Jacob did not know about Rachel's theft of the teraphim?
24. What restrictions did God put upon Laban on the latter's way to catch up with Jacob?

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25. Who were the Arameans? What was their origin and what territories did they occupy in the Near East?
26. Trace briefly their relations with the Israelites as recorded in the Old Testament.
27. How did Laban address Jacob on catching up with him? Why do we pronounce his approach "hypocritical"?
28. What was the substance of Jacob's angry reply? Of what illegal practices did he accuse Laban? How long had he served Laban faithfully?
29. What hardships of his twenty years of service to Laban did Jacob recall? What attempts by Laban to defraud him of his hire did he specify?
30. In what way or ways, probably, had his wages "been changed ten times"?
31. What specific law in the Code of Hammurabi bears upon this particular case?
32. Explain what Jacob meant by "The Fear of Isaac."
33. What was Laban's reply to Jacob's outburst of anger? Did he avoid the issues? Was he merely bluffing or "trying to put on a front"? Or was he making an effort "to save face"?
34. Are we justified in saying that Laban was more concerned about the teraphim than anything else? Why should he have been so concerned about the stolen teraphim?
35. How did Hurrian law bear upon the relation between the teraphim and Jacob's status in Laban's household?
36. What did Laban mean by his proposal "to cut a covenant"?
37. What proposals did Jacob make in return?
38. Explain the "cairn of witness." What particular witness did Jacob set up? Distinguish between the pillar and the cairn.

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39. What two names were given to the memorials set up between Jacob's and Laban's territories? What was the meaning of each?
40. What were the twofold provisions of the treaty between the two? How was Hurrian law related to the stipulation against Jacob's taking other wives?
41. What fallacy is involved in the traditional churchly use of what is called "the Mizpah Benediction"?
42. By what deities did Laban and Jacob respectively swear fidelity to their covenant?
43. Explain what is meant by the statement in v. 50, "no man is with us."
44. What factors in this story indicate that Laban was a polytheist?
45. What phrase in this story indicates that Laban swore by the God of Abraham, Nahor, *and Terah*?
46. What ceremonies concluded the covenant of reconciliation between Jacob and Laban?
47. For what different special purposes were stones used in Old Testament times?
48. List the circumstances of the transactions between Jacob and Laban which reflect details of Hurrian law.
49. With what acts did Laban leave the members of Jacob's household to proceed on his journey homeward?
50. In what various incidents did angels appear in the course of Jacob's life?
51. What was Jacob's experience at Manahaim? Why the name and what did it signify? What was the location?
52. Who made up the *two camps* or *hosts* on this occasion?
53. What probably were Jacob's feelings as he approached his confrontation with Esau?

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54. What preliminary steps did Jacob take looking toward reconciliation with Esau? What information about himself and his household, etc., did he communicate to Esau through the messengers he sent forward to meet him?
55. What report about Esau did Jacob's messengers bring back to him?
56. What probably was Esau doing in Seir at that time with what was equivalent to a military force? How many men did Esau have with him? How reconcile Gen. 32:3 and 36:6-8?
57. How did Jacob acquire the information in the first place as to Esau's whereabouts?
58. What threefold preparation did Jacob resort to, for the purpose of placating his brother?
59. Explain the double phrase, *the land of Seir, the field of Edom*, v. 3.
60. Why was it the natural and proper thing to do to resort to prayer? What were the chief characteristics of Jacob's prayer?
61. Did this prayer include the element of *confession*? Explain your answer.
62. Explain the last phrase of v. 11, "*the mother with the children*."
63. Are Jacob's closing words of his prayer designed to remind God of His promises and to call on Him to keep His word? Explain your answer.
64. What was the "present" which Jacob dispatched to Esau to "propitiate" him? How, and for what purpose, were these gifts "staggered," so to speak?
65. What preparation did Jacob make for battle in case Esau should be belligerent?
66. What explanations are given for Jacob's sending his wives and children across the ford of the Jabbok while remaining himself on the north side? What do you consider the most plausible explanation?

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67. What was the stream over which the crossing was made? What is the meaning of the phrase, "this Jordan," v. 10, in relation to the final crossing?
68. What marvelously sublime event occurred to Jacob on that intervening night?
69. Where was the river Jabbok in relation to the Jordan?
70. What probably was Jacob's purpose in remaining on the north side of the Jabbok?
71. What are some of the views of his motives in so doing? With whom do you agree?
72. What are some of the fantastic theories of this event? What are our reasons for rejecting them?
73. Why do we reject the "folklorish" interpretation of Old Testament events generally?
74. Whom does the Bible itself claim to be the Source of its content? Can we, therefore, treat the Bible "like any other book"?
75. How long did Jacob's wrestling with the mysterious Visitant continue?
76. How does the text itself describe (identify) this Visitant? How does the prophet Hosea speak of Him?
77. What are some of the anthropological explanations of this incident? How does Sir James Frazer "explain" it? What are the objections to these views?
78. What is the anthropological theory of the "evolution" of religious belief and practice?
79. What significance is in the fact that this is not said to be the story of Jacob wrestling with the Other but that of the Visitant wrestling with Jacob?
80. What is the traditional Christian interpretation of the identity of this Visitant? Show how this interpretation is in harmony with Biblical teaching as a whole.

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81. Does this story have any relation to the idea of importunity in prayer?
82. What was the Visitant's purpose in asking Jacob what his name was?
83. What new name did the Visitant confer on Jacob and what did it mean?
84. Do you consider that this incident, and especially this new name, changed Jacob's life in any way? Explain.
85. What significance is in the fact that this new name became the historical name of the people who sprang from the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?
86. Explain: "In spiritual experience there is and must be the challenge of the mysterious." Distinguish between the mysterious and the mystical.
87. What name did Jacob give to the place of this Visitation, and why?
88. What physical defect did the Celestial Visitant impose on Jacob and what spiritual significance did it have?
89. What profound spiritual truths did this experience impress upon Jacob? Did it produce any change in his outlook and his life, and if so, to what extent?
90. In what order did Jacob organize his retinue for the meeting with Esau, and for what purposes?
91. Why did Jacob do obeisance to Esau *seven times* on approaching him? How was this done?
92. Was this a form of flattery or was it simply the prevailing custom or convention? Explain your answer.
93. How would you describe the emotions of each of the two brothers when they faced each other at this meeting?
94. After reading the views of the various commentators on this subject, with whom do you agree, and why?

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95. How did the brothers openly greet each other when they met?
96. Do you believe that Jacob was still distrustful of Esau? If so, on what do you base your opinion?
97. Why did Jacob reject Esau's offer to accompany him on his way? What reason did Jacob give for rejecting also the offer of an escort? Do you think he was sincere? Explain your answer.
98. Where did Jacob first stop on his journey to Canaan? What reasons have we for thinking that he stayed there for several years?
99. What did the word "Succoth" mean? How did it get this name?
100. What are the various meanings of the word "cattle" in the Old Testament?
101. Where did Jacob first settle after crossing the Jordan?
102. Show how all that Jacob asked for in his vow at Bethel was now fulfilled.
103. What was the probable location of Shechem? From whom did it get its name? What was the name of the king of Shechem at the time Jacob settled there? What was his son's name?
104. Why did Jacob purchase a "parcel of ground" near Shechem? What did he pay for it?
105. Explain the correspondence between Genesis 23:17-20 and 33:18-20.
106. What preparation for worship did Jacob make on settling on this piece of ground?
107. To whom did he dedicate this place of worship? What is the meaning of the *name* of deity whom he invoked at this time?
108. What do these acts indicate regarding Jacob's spiritual life and growth?
109. What was the relation between Shechem and the later history of the Samaritans and Mount Gerizim?

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110. Explain the relation between the story of "Jacob's well," as found in the fourth chapter of John, and the Old Testament story of Jacob's sojourn at Shechem. How does Shechem figure throughout Old Testament history?

For further research:

111. What significance is there in the fact that "Israel" and "Israeli" are the names adopted *in our day* for the new nation of the Jews and its citizens?
112. What is, to this writer, perhaps the most intriguing phase of the incident of Jacob's wrestling with the Mysterious Visitant is the fact that the latter, on being asked what His name was, ignored the question (v. 29). What reasons are we justified in assigning to this silence? Instead the Heavenly Visitant "blessed" Jacob then and there (v. 29). What may we rightly assume to have been indicated by, or included in, this divine blessing?

PART FORTY-THREE

THE STORY OF JACOB: INCIDENTS IN CANAAN

(Genesis 34:1—35:28)

The Biblical Account

1 And Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she bare unto Jacob went out to see the daughters of the land. 2 And Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her; and he took her, and lay with her, and humbled her. 3 And his soul clave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spake kindly unto the damsel. 4 And Shechem spake unto his father Hamor, saying, Get me this damsel to wife. 5 Now Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter; and his sons were with his cattle in the field: and Jacob held his peace until they came. 6 And Hamor the father of Shechem went out unto Jacob to commune with him. 7 And the sons of Jacob came in from the fields when they heard it: and the men were grieved, and they were very wroth, because he had wrought folly in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter; which thing ought not to be done. 8 And Hamor communed with them, saying, The soul of my son Shechem longeth for your daughter: I pray you, give her unto him to wife. 9 And make ye marriages with us; give your daughters unto us, and take our daughters unto you. 10 And ye shall dwell with us: and the land shall be before you; dwell and trade ye therein, and get you possessions therein. 11 And Shechem said unto her father and unto her brethren, Let me find favor in your eyes, and what ye shall say unto me I will give. 12 Ask me never so much dowry and gift, and I will give according as ye shall say unto me: but give me the damsel to wife. 13 And the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father with guilt, and spake, because he had defiled Dinah their sister, 14 and said unto

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them, We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one that is uncircumcised; for that were a reproach unto us, 15 Only on this condition will we consent unto you: if ye will be as we are, that every male of you be circumcised; 16 then will we give our daughters unto you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. 17 But if ye will not, hearken unto us, to be circumcised; then will we take our daughter, and we will be gone.

18 And their words pleased Hamor, and Shechem Hamor's son. 19 And the young man deferred not to do the thing, because he had delight in Jacob's daughter: and he was honored above all the house of his father. 20 And Hamor and Shechem his son came unto the gate of their city, and communed with the men of their city, saying, 21 These men are peaceable with us; therefore let them dwell in the land, and trade therein; for, behold, the land is large enough for them; let us take their daughters to us for wives, and let us give them our daughters. 22 Only on this condition will the men consent unto us to dwell with us, to become one people, if every male among us be circumcised, as they are circumcised. 23 Shall not their cattle and their substance and all their beasts be ours? Only let us consent unto them, and they will dwell with us. 24 And unto Hamor and unto Shechem his son hearkened all that went out of the gate of his city; and every male was circumcised, all that went out of the gate of his city. 25 And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city unawares, and slew all the males. 26 And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went forth. 27 The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister. 28 They took their flocks and

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their herds and their asses, and that which was in the city, and that which was in the field; 29 and all their wealth, and all their little ones and their wives, took they captive and made a prey, even all that was in the house. 30 And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me, to make me odious to the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and, I being few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and smite me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house. 31 And they said, Should he deal with our sister as with a harlot?

35. 1 And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, who appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother. 2 Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments: 3 and let us arise, and go up to Beth-el; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went. 4 And they gave unto Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hand, and the rings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem. 5 And they journeyed: and a terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob. 6 So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan (the same is Beth-el), he and all the people that were with him. 7 And he built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el; because there God was revealed unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother. 8 And Deborah Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried below Beth-el under the oak: and the name of it was called Allon-bacuth.

9 And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. 10 And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called

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any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel. 11 And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; 12 and the land which I gave unto Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land. 13 And God went up from him in the place where he spake with him. 14 And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he spake with him, a pillar of stone: and he poured out a drink-offering thereon, and poured oil thereon. 15 And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Beth-el.

16 And they journeyed from Beth-el; and there was still some distance to come to Ephrath: and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labor. 17 And it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; for now thou shalt have another son. 18 And it came to pass, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-oni: but his father called him Benjamin. 19 And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath (the same is Beth-lehem). 20 And Jacob set up a pillar upon her grave: the same is the Pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day. 21 And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Eder. 22 And it came to pass, while Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine: and Israel heard of it.

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: 23 the sons of Leah: Reuben, Jacob's first-born, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun; 24 the sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin; 25 and the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid: Dan and Naphtali; 26 and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's handmaid: Gad and Asher; these are the sons of Jacob, that were born to him in Paddan-aram. 27 And Jacob came unto Isaac his father to Mamre, to

Kiriath-arba (the same is Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac sojourned.

28 *And the days of Isaac were a hundred and four-score years.* 29 *And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, old and full of days: and Esau and Jacob his sons buried him.*

Jacob at Succoth and Shechem: the Narrative Summarized.

Esau, as we have already noted, returned to Seir and Jacob journeyed on slowly to Succoth (33:18-20). At Succoth, Jacob seems to have dwelt for some time; he then moved on to Shechem, at last *in the land of Canaan*. (*Shalem*, in the A.V., meaning "peaceful," "secure", named as a place near Jacob's well; it could be that Shalem is not a proper name. The A.R.V. renders it "Jacob came in *peace* to the city of Shechem." The R.S.V. gives it: "Jacob came *safely* to the city of Shechem." Cf. John 4:5-6: Sychar used to be identified with Shechem. It is now thought to have been about half a mile north of Jacob's well, and a short distance southeast of Shechem). Near Shechem Jacob bought a field of Hamor, the prince of the region, and pitched his tent there and erected an altar. Here Dinah, his daughter by Leah, having mingled with the daughters of the land, was carried off by Shechem, the son of Hamor. The young man wished to atone for his unseemly conduct by marriage, and both he and his father endeavored to propitiate Jacob and his sons. The brethren of Dinah, *with guile*, agreed to the alliance, but demanded the circumcision of the Shechemites; and on the third day after the ceremony Simeon and Levi fell upon the city, slew all the males, including Hamor and Shechem, took Dinah from the house of the young prince, and carried off the women, children, cattle and all material possessions of the Shechemites. Jacob rebuked his children for this cruel and

treacherous act, and remembered it in his death-bed predictions regarding Simeon and Levi (33:18-20; ch. 34; also 49:5-7).

1. *The Rape of Dinah*, vv. 1-31

The immediate objective of Jacob on his return from Paddan-aram was Shechem in the hills of Palestine, just as it had been that of his grandfather Abraham (Gen. 12:6). He encamped east of the city and bought a parcel of ground from the sons of Hamor (Benei-Hamor) evidently the tribe that had established itself there. Their tribal deity seems to have been Baal-berith; this is how they are known to us in the story of the conquest of central Palestine under Joshua (cf. Josh. 8:33). (Cf. Judg. 9:46: it seems that for the Israelites later, on drifting into idolatry—in this case as generally—meant drifting into the usual “mode of cultural absorption” whereby they acquired the name El-berith, El having been to the Hebrews the short form of Elohim, God.) Jacob’s purchase of a field is in a certain sense parallel to Abraham’s purchase of the field and cave at Mamre (cf. 23:18 and 33:19).

The outstanding event—and the most interesting, from various points of view—of the prolonged sojourn of Jacob and his household (clan) in Shechem is the dramatic episode about the treachery of Simeon and Levi, and its backdrop, so to speak, in the rape of Dinah by the prince of Shechem. Speiser comments pointedly on these incidents as follows: “The narrative is unusual on more counts than one. For one thing, it is the only account to concern itself with Jacob’s daughter Dinah, who is otherwise relegated to two statistical entries (30:21, 46:15). For another, Jacob himself has a minor part, while the spotlight rests on the next generation. For still another, there is a pronounced chronological gap between this section and the one before. There, Jacob’s children were still of tender age (33:13); here, they have attained

adulthood. Most important of all, the history of Jacob has hitherto been in the main a story of individuals. This time, to be sure, personalities are still very much at the forefront of the stage; but their experiences serve to recapitulate an all but lost page dealing with remote ethnic interrelations. The account, in other words, presents personalized history, that is, history novelistically interpreted. And since we have so little evidence about the early settlement of Israelites in Canaan, the slender thread that we find here assumes that much more importance. By the same token, extra caution is needed to protect the sparse data from undue abuse" (ABG, 266). Again: "The story before us is a tale of sharp contrasts: pastoral simplicity and grim violence, love and revenge, candor and duplicity. There is also a marked difference between the generations. Hamor and Jacob are peace-loving and conciliatory; their sons are impetuous and heedless of the consequences that their acts must entail. The lovesick Shechem prevails on his father to extend to the Israelites the freedom of the land—with the requisite consent of his followers. But Dinah's brothers refuse to be that far-sighted. After tricking the Shechemites into circumcising their males, and thus stripping the place of its potential defenders, they put the inhabitants to the sword. Jacob is mournful and apprehensive. But his sons remain defiant and oblivious of the future" (*ibid.*, 268).

This may well be described as the story of a "generation gap" of the "long, long ago."

Note that Dinah is specifically mentioned as the daughter of Leah. "Like mother, like daughter." Of Leah it is said, *And Leah went out to meet him* (30:16), and now her daughter went out. She is described as Leah's daughter in order to draw attention to the fact that she was the full sister of Simeon and Levi who avenged her (v. 25) and *whom she had borne unto Jacob*

is added to indicate that all the brothers were jealous for her honor" (SC, 205). Dinah, we are told, went out to see the daughters of the land, that is, she evidently went into the city (Jacob had pitched his tent outside it). And Prince Shechem saw her, and, like the pagan he was, *took her and humbled her*. "The verb always implies the use of force. Although Shechem was a *prince of the land*, she evidently did not submit of her own free will" (SC, 205). "Though freed from foreign troubles Jacob met with a great domestic calamity in the fall of his only recorded daughter. According to Josephus she had been attending a festival; but it is highly probable that she had been often and freely mixing in the society of the place, and that being a simple, inexperienced, and vain young woman, had been flattered by the attentions of the ruler's son. There must have been time and opportunities of acquaintance to produce the strong attachment that Shechem had for her" (Jamieson, CECG, 219). It is useless to speculate as to whether she was prompted by mere idle curiosity, in this instance, or whether she went without consulting her parents, or whether she even went forth contrary to their wishes. We have no means of knowing to what extent she was at fault, if at all. "In any case, it seems she should have known that Egyptians and Canaanites (12:15, 20:2, 26:7) regarded unmarried women abroad in the land as legitimate prey and should not have gone unattended. Shechem happens to find her. The fact that he is the son of Hamor, a Hivite, prince, seems to make him feel that he especially has privileges in reference to unattended girls. We are not told whether she was pleased with and encouraged his first approaches. At least the young prince was bent upon seduction. This his object was accomplished, whether she resisted or not. If 48:22 informs us that the inhabitants of Shechem were Amorites, the apparent contradiction seems to be solved by the fact that the general name for the Canaanite tribes

was Amorites" (Leupold, EG, 897). (Surely our present-day knowledge of the gross immoralities which characterized the Cult of Fertility so widespread throughout the ancient pagan world (cf. Rom. 1:18-32) would cause us to think that Shechem would have had no scruples against seizing and violating the young maiden the first time he ever saw her. We see no point in "sugar-coating" this plain case of rape, or the acts of presumption, treachery and violence which ensued as consequences of it. The Bible, it must be remembered is a very realistic book: it pictures life just as people lived it.) It should be said, however, in favor of the young prince, that he really loved the maiden: *his soul clave unto her* (v. 3). Of course Dinah would have been only one among the many others of his harem, if the marriage had been formalized. "It was in some degree an extenuation of the wickedness of Shechem that he did not cast off the victim of his violence and lust, but continued to regard her with affection . . . addressed to her such words as were agreeable to her inclinations (v. 3, *spake to the heart of the damsel*) probably expressing his affection, and offering the reparation of honorable marriage, as may be legitimately inferred from what is next recorded of his behavior" (PCG, 405).

How old was Dinah when this incident occurred? We suggest the following explanation of the chronological problem here: "Dinah was born about the end of the fourteenth year of Jacob's residence in Haran. She was thus about six years old at the settlement at Succoth. The sojourn at Succoth appears to have lasted for about two years. Jacob must have spent already several years at Shechem, since there are prominent and definite signs of a more confidential intercourse with the Shechemites. We may infer, therefore, that Dinah was now from twelve to sixteen years of age. Joseph was seventeen years old when he was sold by his brethren (37:2), and at that time Jacob

had returned to Hebron. There must have passed, therefore, about eleven years since the return from Haran, at which time Joseph was six years of age. If now we regard the residence of Jacob at Bethel and the region of Ephrata as of brief duration, and bear in mind that the residence at Shechem ceased with the rape of Dinah, it follows that Dinah must have been about fourteen or fifteen years of age when she was deflowered. In the East, too, females reach the age of puberty at twelve, and sometimes still earlier (Delitzsch). From the same circumstances it is clear that Simeon and Levi must have been about twenty" (Lange). Again: "If Dinah was born before Joseph (30:21) she was probably in her seventh year when Jacob reached Succoth (33:17); but it does not follow that she was only six or seven years of age when the incident about to be described occurred (Tuch, Bohlen). If Jacob stayed two years at Succoth and eight in Shechem (Peta-vius), and if, as is probable, his residence in Shechem terminated with his daughter's dishonor (Lange), and if, moreover, Joseph's sale into Egypt happened soon after (Hengstenberg), Dinah may at this time have been in her sixteenth or seventeenth year (Kurtz). Yet there is no reason why she should not have been younger, say between thirteen and fifteen (Keil, Lange, Kalisch, Murhpy, *et alii*), since in the East females attain to puberty at the age of twelve, and sometimes earlier (Delitzsch)" (PCG, 404). With reference to the statement in v. 1, Whitelaw comments: "it is not implied that this was the first occasion on which Dinah left her mother's tent to mingle with the city maidens in Shechem: the expression is equivalent to 'once upon a time she went out' (Hengstenberg)—*to see the daughters of the land*—who were gathered at a festive entertainment (Josephus, *Ant.*, I, 21, 1), a not improbable supposition (Kurtz), though the language rather indicates the paying of a friendly visit (Lange),

or the habitual practice of associating with the Shechemite women (Bush), in their social entertainment, if not in their religious festivals" (PCG, 404).

Vv. 2-4. "Shechem was captivated by Dinah, the daughter of Jacob; he fell in love with the young girl and comforted her. Accordingly Shechem said to his father Hamor, 'Get me this young girl, I want to marry her'" (JB rendering). (Cf. Samson's request, Judg. 14:2). Vv. 5-7: Jacob somehow heard of the incident, but took no steps to redress the wrong until Dinah's brothers—Jacob's sons by Leah and probably by Zilpah—came in from the fields. It is interesting to note that the brothers of the daughter had a voice in all important concerns relating to her (cf. 24:50ff.). In the meantime Hamor, Shechem's father, consulted with Jacob about the incident. When the sons came in from the field, and were told what had occurred, they *were very wroth* because Shechem *had wrought folly in Israel by his act . . . which thing ought not to be done*, etc. This idea of folly in Israel seems to have been that of Jacob's sons, though the manner of expressing it seems to have been that of the historian, as usual in his time: folly or wickedness in Israel, where God ought to be revered and obeyed. As we know that the Canaanites were steeped in immorality: *ought not*, etc. refers to Israel: it was repulsive to the house of Israel. (It is a matter of note that this is the first use of the new name in the Old Testament). *Folly*: "this is a standing expression for crimes which are irreconcilable with the dignity and destiny of Israel as the people of God, but especially for gross sins of the flesh (Deut. 22:21, Judg. 20:10, 2 Sam. 13:12), but also for other great crimes (Josh. 7:15)." "The sons of Jacob were enraged; they burned with anger; *it was kindled to them*" (Gosman, in Lange, 560). In this case the dishonor was a double impurity, because it was an uncircumcised person who had dishonored the maiden. Moreover, She-

chem's special wickedness consisted in dishonoring a daughter of one who was the head of the theocratic line, and therefore under peculiar obligations to live a holy life.

Vv. 8-12: Hamor, the king, now offers Jacob and his sons the full rights of citizens in his little country. The son offers to fulfil any demand of the brothers as to the bridal price and bridal gifts. The king offers them the privilege of unrestricted movement throughout his domain, with the right of establishing settlements, carrying on trade, and acquiring property. (Perhaps it should be stated here, parenthetically, that we do not know what happened to Dinah after this incident. "Dinah was in Shechem's house all this time, and although he believed that he could have her by force, being the son of the prince of the land, he spoke thus because he wanted to win her by consent. Scripture does not record what happened to her afterwards; she probably remained 'a living widow,' i.e., unmarried, descended to Egypt with the rest of the family, died there, and her body was brought back by Simeon and buried in Canaan. According to tradition, her tomb is in Arbeel. Sforino suggests that he [Shechem] offered the large dowry and gift as an atonement" (SC, 206). Hamor seems to have taken a rather "broad" view of the matter: in addition to offering to arrange this particular marriage, he proposes an amalgamation of the two ethnic peoples, thinking, apparently, that the advantage to Jacob would be adequate compensation for the offense. His son's offer, obviously, related only to his own private affair with respect to Dinah. (The Hebrew law of compensation for seduction is given in Exo. 22:15ff. . . . the price paid to the parents (Exo. 22:16-17, 1 Sam. 18:25) . . . and the gift to the bride, are virtually distinguished in Gen. 24:53).

The story of the fanatical revenge of the sons of Jacob follows, vv. 14-31. The sons of Jacob answered the king and his son with guile, i.e., with duplicity. As noted above,

they were consumed with rage: *it burned them greatly* (cf. 31:36, 1 Sam. 15:11, 2 Sam. 19:43). "Michaelis mentions an opinion still entertained in the East which explains the excessive indignation kindled in the breasts of Dinah's brothers, viz., that 'in those countries it is thought that a brother is more dishonored by the seduction of his sister than a man by the infidelity of his wife; for, say the Arabs, a man may divorce his wife, and then she is no longer his, while a sister and daughter remain always sister and daughter'" (PCG, 405). Some writers express the opinion that the refusal lay basically in the proposal itself, that is, if they had not refused they would have denied the historical and saving vocation of Israel and his seed. "The father, Israel, appears, however, to have been of a different opinion. For he doubtless knew the proposal of his sons in reply. He does not condemn their proposition, however, but the fanatical way in which they availed themselves of its consequences. Dinah could not come into her proper relations again but by Shechem's passing over to Judaism. This way of passing over to Israel was always allowable, and those who took the steps were welcomed. We must therefore reject only: (1) The extension of the proposal, according to which the Israelites were to blend themselves with the Shechemites; (2) the motives, which were external advantages. It was, on the contrary, a harsh and unsparing course in reference to Dinah, when Leah's two sons wished her back again; or, indeed, would even gratify their revenge and Israelitish pride. But their resort to subtle and fanatical conduct merits only a hearty condemnation" (Lange, 561). (Note that "Jacob had scarcely become Israel when the arts and cunning of Jacob appear in his sons, and, indeed, in a worse form, since they glory in being Israel" (*ibid.*, 560).

Note that the duplicity of Leah's sons consisted in *their utter hypocrisy and accompanying trifling with a divine institution* (just as people in our day, and thousands

of professings church-members trifle with the institution of Christian baptism. This writer has had parents request of him what they called "infant baptism" solely for the purpose of acquiring a legitimate birth certificate for the child: a modernized hypocritical form of union of church and state.) These brothers answered "deceitfully." "The honor of their family consisted in having the sign of the covenant. Circumcision was the external rite by which persons were admitted members of the ancient Church (rather, *theocracy* or *commonwealth*: the church is first, last, and always the *ecclesia* of Christianity and was never a part of the Jewish system). But although that outward rite could not make the Shechemites true Israelites, yet it does not appear that Jacob's sons required anything more. Nothing is said of their teaching them to worship the true God, but only of their insisting on the Shechemites being circumcised; and it is evident that they did not seek to convert Shechem, but only made a show of religion—a cloak to cover their diabolical design. Hypocrisy and deceit, in all cases vicious, are infinitely more so when accompanied with a show of religion; and here the sons of Jacob, under the pretense of conscientious scruples, conceal a scheme of treachery as cruel and diabolical as was perhaps ever perpetrated" (Jamieson, 221). "The demand was made that they [Shechemite males] should circumcise themselves in the belief that they or their townspeople would not consent (Sforno). Although Shechem and Hamor spoke to Jacob and his sons, only the latter answered, Jacob remaining silent because the incident was so disgraceful that he could not speak about it. Jacob and all his sons assented to this guile, either for the reason given by Sforno, or because they thought to take advantage of the resulting weakness to get Dinah out of Shechem's house. But only Simeon and Levi contemplated the revenge which was subsequently taken (Nachmanides)" (SC, 206). (It seems to me, however,

that any person with moral standards of consequence could not possibly excuse Jacob's silence on so flimsy a ground. The fact appears to be that Israel had drifted back into the role of Jacob, despite what may be suggested as a "reason"—in reality, a pretext—for his failure to act, if for no other purpose than to protect the moral and spiritual image implicit in his theocratic pre-eminence.) "The ground on which they declined a matrimonial alliance with Shechem was good; their sin lay in advancing this simply as a pretext to enable them to wreak their unholy vengeance on Shechem and his innocent people. The treacherous character of their next proposal [vv. 15-16] is difficult to be reconciled with any claim to humanity, far less to religion, on the part of Jacob's sons; so much so, that Jacob on his death-bed can offer no palliation for the atrocious cruelty to which it led (49:6-7). . . . This proposal was sinful, since (1) they had no right to offer the sign of God's covenant to a heathen people; (2) they had less right to employ it in ratification of a merely human agreement; and (3) they had least right of all to employ it in duplicity as a mask for their treachery" (PCG, 406).

Parenthetically, *the question of the extent and design of the practice of circumcision obtrudes itself at this point.* It will be noted that when the proposal made by the sons of Leah was presented to the males of Shechem, the primary argument for its acceptance was the material advantage which such an alliance would inevitably secure for them. The appeal of the rulers was in the strongest manner to the self-interest of the Shechemites: Jacob's house was wealthy, and the Shechemites therefore could only gain by the connection: as stated above, a complete amalgamation of the two groups. "Hamor naturally says nothing of the personal matter, but dwells on the advantages the clan will derive from union with the Israelites. The men are already *on friendly terms* with them; the land is

spacious enough; and by adopting circumcision they will obtain a great accession to their wealth" (Skinner, 420). The ready acquiescence of the Shechemites has with some measure of validity been regarded by some authorities as a proof that they were already acquainted with circumcision as a social, if not religious rite. "Knobel notes it as remarkable that the Hivites were not circumcised, since, according to Herodotus, the rite was observed among the Phoenicians, and probably also the Canaanites, who were of the same extraction, and thinks that either the rite was not universally observed in any of these ancient nations where it was known, or that the Hivites were originally a different race from the Canaanites, and had not conformed to the customs of the land (Lange). Murphy thinks the present instance may point out one way in which the custom spread from tribe to tribe (PCG, 408). As a matter of fact "According to Herodotus, circumcision was practised by the Phoenicians, and probably also among the Canaanites, who were of the same race and are never referred to in the Old Testament as uncircumcised, as, e.g., it speaks of the unCanaanitish Philistines" (Lange, 561); cf. *uncircumcised* Philistines, 1 Sam. 14:6, 17:26, 36; 1 Sam. 31:4; 2 Sam. 1:20; 1 Chron. 10:4, etc. Some authorities think that the spread of circumcision was the consequence of the growing awareness of its value as a sanitary measure. That it did exist among the Egyptians, Canaanites, and Hebrews is well established; but not, so far as the records go, among the Greeks, Romans, and Hindoos. At the present time, we are told, it is to be found among all Moslems and most Jewish communities, throughout Africa, Australia, Polynesia, and Melanesia, and, it is said, in Eastern Mexico. "It is hardly possible to say what its original distribution was, and whether or not there was a single center of distribution. As to its origin many theories have been advanced. Its character as initiatory is not an explanation—all customs of initiation

need to have their origins explained. . . . It may be said at the outset that it must have sprung from simple physical need, not from advanced scientific or religious conceptions" (Toy, IHR, 69). The simple fact is that for the Hebrews it was specifically appointed a Divine institution, a fleshly sign, to separate God's people of olden times from the pagan world and at the same time to serve as a symbol of religious faith and moral purity. Circumcision was a divinely *appointed* sign of the old covenant, much in the same manner, it would seem that the rainbow was appointed a sign of God's promise (covenant) to Noah and all mankind that He would never bring a universal judgment on the human race in the form of a Deluge, and as the bread and fruit of the vine of the Lord's Supper were appointed memorials of the death of Christ for our sins (Gen. 8:20-22; Matt. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:23-28; 1 Cor. 15:13, etc.). Surely it is not to be understood that these things came into existence just at the respective times they were appointed signs, memorials, etc. It would be unreasonable to assume that they had not existed from the beginning, that is, "from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 13:15, 25:34; Luke 11:50, John 17:24, Eph. 1:4, 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8, 17:8; Heb. 4:3, etc.). "With respect to the symbolical significance of circumcision it is said to have originated in phallus worship, but if so this would have no bearing on the Israelite view of the rite. It was practised, say some, because of its medical advantages, as the warding off of disease through ease in cleanliness, or that it served to increase the generative powers, but these can hardly be received as proper explanations, for whole nations not practicing circumcision appear as healthy and fruitful. Nor can the rite be brought into connection with the idea of sacrifice, 'the consecration of a part of the body for the whole,' or even 'as an act of emasculation in honor of the Deity, that has gradually dwindled down to the mere cutting away of the foreskin.' We must

rather look for the significance of this rite in the fact that the corruption of sin usually manifests itself with peculiar energy in the sexual life, and that the sanctification of the life was symbolized by the purifying of the organ by which life is reproduced. But, as spiritual purity was demanded of the chosen people of God, circumcision became the external token of the covenant between God and His people. It secured to the one subjected to it all the rights of the covenant, participation in all its material and spiritual benefits; while, on the other hand, he was bound to fulfill all the covenant obligations. It had not, however, a sacramental nature; it was not a vehicle through which to convey the sanctifying influences of God to His people, but was simply a token of the recognition of the covenant relation existing between Israel and God" (UBD, s.v., 206). (We must call attention to the fact, however, that the word "sacrament" derives from the Latin *sacramentum*, which was the name of the oath of obedience taken by the Roman soldier to his centurion. In this sense, circumcision was indeed a "sacrament," the oath of fidelity to the provisions of the Old Covenant by the Covenant-people. We reject the theological corruption of the term in using it to designate some mystical ["esoteric"] impartation [usually explained as a "means of grace"] from God to His New-Covenant people.) Circumcision was formally enacted as a legal institution by Moses (Lev. 12:3, John 7:22-23), and was made to apply, not only to the Jewish father's own children, but to slaves, home-born or purchased; to foreigners before they could partake of the Passover or become Jewish citizens (Cf. Gen. 17:13—*he that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with money of any foreigner not of thy seed*, etc.). In its specific meaning for the Children of Israel circumcision was a *seal*, a seal in the flesh, as the Old Covenant was a fleshly Covenant, and hence indicative of the relationship designed to obtain between God and His Old-

Covenant people, proffered by grace and accepted by the obedience of faith. See my *Genesis*, Vol. III, 250-264, 272-282).

"During the wilderness journey circumcision fell into disuse. This neglect is most satisfactorily explained as follows: The nation, while bearing the punishment of disobedience in its wanderings, was regarded as under temporary rejection by God, and was therefore prohibited from using the sign of the covenant. As the Lord had only promised his assistance on condition that the law given by Moses was faithfully observed, it became the duty of Joshua, upon entering Canaan, to perform the rite of circumcision upon the generation that had been born in the wilderness. This was done, immediately upon crossing the Jordan, at or near Gilgal (Josh. 5:2-9). From this time circumcision became the pride of Israel, they looking with contempt upon all those people not observing it (Judg. 14:3, 15:18; 1 Sam. 14:6, Isa. 52:1, etc.). It became a rite so distinctive of them that their oppressors tried to prevent their observing it, an attempt to which they refused submission (1 Macc. 1:48, 50, 60, 62). "The process of restoring a circumcised person to his natural condition by a surgical operation was sometimes undergone from a desire to assimilate themselves to the heathen around them, or that they might not be known as Jews when they appeared naked in the games. Against having recourse to this practice, from an excessive anti-Judaistic tendency, St. Paul cautions the Corinthians (1 Cor. 7:18, 19). Circumcision was used as a symbol of purity of heart, in certain instances (Deut. 10:16, 30:6; cf. Lev. 26:41; Jer. 4:4, 9:25; Ezek. 44:7). Exod. 6:12—"Who am of uncircumcised lips": By this figure Moses would seem to imply that he was unskilled in public address, as the Jews were wont to consider circumcision a perfecting of one's powers. Circumcision is also figurative of a readiness to hear and obey (Jer. 6:10)" (UBG, 207).

(For Christian [spiritual] circumcision, see my *Genesis*, Vol. III, 282-290).

Skinner holds that the requirement of circumcision imposed by the sons of Jacob upon the Shechemites "was merely a pretext to render them incapable of self-defense" (ICCG, 419). Certainly the Scripture account of the transaction contains no hint of anything that would refute this view; if it be true, it renders their duplicity even more perfidious. And even though the rulers of Shechem and their people agreed to the proposal—even though for reasons of expediency (for them no question of morality was involved)—Jacob's sons' must have rejoiced within themselves that those against whom they sought revenge were so open-minded as to accept a proposal that would render them so completely helpless against the execution of this vengeance. And so we read, that "*on the third day when they* (the Shechemites) *were sore* ("when the inflammation is said, in the case of adults, to be at its height"), two of the sons of Jacob, namely, Simeon and Levi took the lead in attacking the unsuspecting city with the sword, killing the males therein, and carrying off the women and children and all material goods as spoils. In this ferocious act of revenge they slew both Hamor and Shechem "with the edge of the sword and took Dinah out of Shechem's house" (vv. 25-26).

Jacob's displeasure (vv. 30, 31) seems to have been occasioned by the principle of expediency rather than by considerations of morality or righteousness. The massacre "displeased Jacob, the more so since he had few supporters and he was a 'sojourner' who could ill afford enemies" (AtD, 92). "Jacob rebukes Simeon and Levi, not for their treachery and cruelty, but for their recklessness in exposing the whole tribe to the vengeance of the Canaanites" (ICCG, 421). Lange is inclined to be a bit more lenient: "Jacob felt that, as the Israel of God, he was made offensive even to the moral sense of the surrounding

heathen, through the pretended holy deed of his sons; so far so that they had endangered the very foundation of the theocracy, the kingdom of God, the old-covenant church. Fanaticism always produces the same results; either to discredit Christianity in the moral estimate of the world, and imperil its very existence by its unreasonable zeal, or to expose it to the most severe persecutions" (CDHCG, 564). Whitelaw summarizes as follows: "That Jacob should have spoken to his sons only of his own danger, and not of their guilt, has been ascribed to his belief that this was the only motive which their carnal minds could understand (Keil, Gerlach); to a remembrance of his own deceitfulness, which disqualified him in a measure from being the censor of his sons (Kalisch, Wordsworth); to the lowered moral and spiritual tone of his own mind (Candlish); to the circumstance that, having indulged his children in their youth, he was now afraid to reprove them (Inglis). That Jacob afterwards attained to a proper estimate of their bloody deed his last prophetic utterance reveals (49:5-7). By some it is supposed that he even now felt the crime in all its heinousness (Kalisch), though his reproach was somewhat leniently expressed in the word 'trouble' (Lange); while others, believing Jacob's abhorrence of his sons' fanatical cruelty to have been deep and real, account for its omission by the historian on the ground that he aimed merely at showing 'the protection of God (35:5), through which Jacob escaped the evil consequences of their conduct' (Hengstenberg)" (PCG, 408). Note the sons' attempted justification: "*Should he [Shechem] deal with our sister as with a harlot*"? That is, "She is not a harlot and her wrong must be avenged; so we as her brothers had to do it" (SC, 209). *But Shechem offered Dinah honorable marriage!*

Note vv. 27-29—In "the sons of Jacob" here surely *all* the sons of Jacob are included. It is inconceivable that only two of them could have massacred all the males

of the city. They must have had the help of other males (servants, herdsmen) in Jacob's *entourage*. Simeon and Levi, however, were the ringleaders. But the other males were surely involved: the prospect of loot becomes to many the primary, rather than the secondary motivation when a mob forms. "They who seemed to have scruples or fears about taking part in the slaughter have no compunctions of conscience about taking a hand in the plundering of the city. This act of theirs again does them little credit. The thing that ranked in the bosom of all was that this was 'the city that had defiled their sister.' They are, indeed, largely correct in imputing to the city a share in the wrong done; for the city condoned the wrong and had not the slightest intentions of taking steps to right it. But only the most excessive cruelty can demand such a wholesale retribution for a personal wrong. . . . Then to show how thoroughly Jacob's sons were in the heat of their vengeance the author reports that also 'all their wealth and all their little ones and their wives' were captured, the latter, no doubt, being kept as slaves. Then to produce the impression that the sacking of the city was done with utmost thoroughness the writer adds: 'and they plundered even everything that was in the houses.' By translating thus we remove the necessity of textual changes which the critics regard as necessary" (EG, 909). (But can we truly say that the Shechemites did nothing to right the wrong done Dinah? Only if we assume, of course, that their proposal for amalgamation was motivated solely by expediency without any awareness of the moral law which had been violated. But again did they have any notion of moral law whatsoever? Of course, we have no way of obtaining conclusive answers to these questions.) Again: "It is almost unbelievable that Jacob should be reproached by commentators at this point for what he is supposed to have failed to say, namely, for not rebuking Simeon and Levi for 'their treachery and cruelty.'