

# TAMING JACOB

HOW A RESTLESS SOUL FOUND PEACE WITH GOD

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B S POH



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Dedicated to  
my mother Tan Puay Peng,  
and my late father, Poh Jwe Luck.



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# FOREWORD

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Jacob was a restless soul who deceived others to gain for himself. He deceived his brother. He deceived his father. He deceived himself, not knowing that God knew all that he was doing. God weaned him off self, so that he finally submitted to become useful in His service.

It is expected that the substance of these pages will be used by God to speak to some restless souls. God's sovereignty encompasses human responsibility. Jacob could not excuse himself from his wrongs against God and men. God's mercy extended to unworthy Jacob. God was leading him, despite his reliance on self, to flee to his uncle Laban in Syria. Two crisis experiences marked his spiritual pilgrimage to know God – his encounter with God at Bethel, which awakened him to the reality of the spiritual realm, and his wrestling match with the Lord at Peniel, which brought him to full submission to Him. His time with Laban, in the period between the two crises, was used by God to weaned this self-centred worldling off his horizontal perspective of life to seek a vertical relationship with his Maker. These events show what it means to come to saving faith in the Lord Almighty. The trials and sorrow he experienced in later years show what will be involved in the surrendered life of faith, and service to the Lord. His final days show how he was used of the Lord to the end, when he was comforted with the knowledge that it was a race well run, a battle well fought.

From beginning to end, our attention is swept forward to catch a sight of the coming Saviour, Jesus Christ. The glimpse at the beginning, seen in the covenant promises which he inherited from his forebears, grows brighter as the events unfolded in Jacob's life, until the morning star arose in his heart at Peniel. The trials and sorrow faced in the later years of this old, and lame, man were accompanied by a discernible calmness which grew, culminating in resigna-

tion to His Creator after he pronounced the covenant blessings upon his sons.

We do well to heed the light that shines through the life of Jacob.

B S Poh,

Kuala Lumpur, December 2018.

## Genesis 25:19-33

19 This is the genealogy of Isaac, Abraham's son. Abraham begot Isaac. 20 Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian. 21 Now Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. 22 But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If all is well, why am I like this?" So she went to inquire of the Lord.

23 And the Lord said to her: "Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger." 24 So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb. 25 And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. 26 Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. 27 So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. 28 And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29 Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. 30 And Esau said to Jacob, "Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary." Therefore his name was called Edom. 31 But Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright as of this day." 32 And Esau said, "Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?" 33 Then Jacob said, "Swear to me as of this day." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.



# One

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## A DECEIVER WAS BORN

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*The old man smiles in pleasure as he hears the first cry of the baby his wife has given birth to. He is a father at last, after twenty years of marriage (Gen. 25:20, 26)! The chatter of excitement of the womenfolk from the bedroom can be heard. There are squeals of laughter. He hears one say, "Look, his brother is coming out! And look, he is grasping his brother's heel!" "What a Supplanter (Jacob, 'One Who Takes The Heel')!" There is more laughter. The second baby's cry can be heard now.*

*The twin babies born to Isaac and Rebecca were not identical (Gen. 25:24-28). One was covered in thick, red, hair all over his body. The other, in contrast, looked like a stripped chicken. One was named Esau, meaning 'Hairy', and nicknamed Edom, meaning 'Red'. The other, named Jacob, is the protagonist of our series of studies. Esau grew up a lover of the outdoors, and became a skilful hunter. His father loved him more than his brother. Jacob grew up to be a mild, homely, man who was more brains than brawn. His mother loved him more than his brother. These were the ingredients for conflict and heartache in the family, as we shall see.*

Most biographies trace back the ancestry of the protagonist three generations, together perhaps with passing reference to the distant ancestry. We will do that with Jacob, looking back at his ancestry up to his grandfather, Abraham. We will then look forward to his significance to us today. It will be shown that Jacob's life reveals to us the coming of Jesus Christ and the sanctifying influence of the gospel.

### 1.1 Looking Back At Jacob's Ancestry

#### *Jacob's ancestors*

Jacob's grandfather was the illustrious Abraham, the Hebrew man called by God from Ur of the Chaldeans. We are told in Genesis 11:27-32,

This is the genealogy of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran begot Lot. And Haran died before his father Terah in his native land, in Ur of the Chaldeans. Then Abram and Nahor took wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and the father of Iscah. But Sarai was barren; she had no child. And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there. So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran.

In Genesis 15:7, God said to Abraham, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."

Terah was 70 years old when he began to have children. Abraham was born when Terah was 130 years old, around the year 2165 BC (Gen. 11:32 cf. 12:4). Terah died at the age of 205 years old, in a trading town called Haran in upper Euphrates (Gen. 11:32). The youngest son, Haran, was probably named after the city he was born in. It must be understood that people lived long lives at that time. In fact, the lifespan of man in the days of Adam was much longer. Adam lived 930 years (Gen. 5:5). His children lived over 900 years or nearly so. The longest living man was Methuselah who lived 969 years (Gen. 5:27). You might think that these records were the result of copying errors by the scribes. We might allow for one or two errors, but we would hesitate to claim copying errors when there were so many cases. The Scripture cannot be wrong. The difficulty of the long ages is only apparently so. There is, in fact, a good explanation. We know that Adam and Eve were the first humans created by God. They had a rich gene pool. As their descendants spread throughout the world, after the time of Noah, they would marry between those in their own localities. This would have resulted in their gene pool

being diluted. This also accounts for certain characteristics becoming more prominent in each ethnic group – including the colours of the skin, hair and eyes, the facial features, the length of the limbs relative to the body, etc. As the gene pool got diluted, proneness to diseases set in, and the human lifespan shortened. People in Abraham's time lived beyond 150 years old. By the time we come to Moses, around the year 1400 BC, the lifespan of man was reduced to below 150 years old. Moses himself died at age 120 years old. Moses was inspired by the Holy Spirit to foretell that the lifespan of man would settle at 75 years (Ps. 90:10).

### *The Abrahamic covenant*

God made a covenant with Abraham. It was introduced in Genesis 12. We read in verses 1-3, and 7,

Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land."

Although first mentioned in Chapter 12, the covenant was actually made during the events recorded in Chapter 15. The ancient ceremony of entering into a covenant, involving the cutting in half of animals, was carried out. We are told in verse 18,

On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates..."

The covenant was reaffirmed with Abraham in Chapter 17. We read in verses 18-22,

And Abraham said to God, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!" Then God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I

have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year." Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.

There were two aspects to the covenant that God made with Abraham. There was a temporal aspect that applied to all the physical descendants of Abraham. It was of limited duration, and conditional upon the keeping of God's law, including the need for the males to be circumcised. Included in the temporal aspect of the covenant was the promise of land (Gen. 12:7; 15:18-21; 17:8) and a nation (Gen. 12:2), which would last until the Saviour arrived (Gal. 3:19).

There was also a spiritual aspect to the covenant which was eternal and unconditional in nature. It applied to all the spiritual descendants of Abraham, who shared the same faith in the Saviour who would descend from him (Gen. 12:3; 22:18; Gal. 3:8, 16). Abraham was declared righteous before God because of believing in the promised Saviour. It says in Genesis 15:4-6,

And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

In Galatians 3:6 we are told that Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Verses 7-9 goes on to say,

Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.



This must be seen in the light of verse 16 which says, 'Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.'

### *The patriarchs*

The covenant made with Abraham was passed on to Isaac (Gen. 26:2-5), and then to Jacob (Gen. 28:10-17). Abraham was called upon to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice to God. At the last moment, God restrained Abraham and substituted the sacrifice with a ram (Gen. 22:9-10, 13). The sacrifice of Isaac and the substitution of the ram point us to the coming of Christ, who was sacrificed as the perfect substitute for His people. Isaac, who was as good as dead, but lived, was a type of Christ. Abraham learned the lesson that God is "Jehovah Jireh" – *The-LORD-Will-Provide* (Gen. 22:14). The Angel of the LORD reaffirmed the covenant blessing with Abraham (Gen. 22:16-18):

"By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

Isaac himself had to come to a personal knowledge of God before the covenant blessing was passed on to him. After being harassed by the Philistines over the wells he had dug, he was finally left at peace and called the place "Rehoboth" – *Spaciousness* (Gen. 26:22). It was there that he called on the name of the LORD, when God passed on the covenant blessing to him, saying (Gen. 26:24):

"I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake."

Without a personal knowledge of God, the covenant blessing could not be appropriated. Jacob was to come to faith only after prolonged seeking to know the LORD. The covenant blessing was promised to him when he was first awakened to the reality of the spiritual realm

in Bethel, while running away from home. God met him in a dream and said to him:

"I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

Jacob came to faith in God at Peniel, where his name was changed to Israel – *Prince with God* (Gen. 32:28). The covenant blessing was reaffirmed with him when he came back to Bethel, where he had met with God twenty years ago (Gen. 35:11-12):

"I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land."

Jacob was now poised to be used by God as the bearer of the covenant promises. He would in turn pass on the covenant blessing to his twelve sons, who would constitute the nation of Israel – the covenantal nation of God from whom the Saviour would arise. King David expressed God's dealings with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the nation of Israel in the words of Psalm 105:7-15,

He is the Lord our God; His judgments are in all the earth. He remembers His covenant forever, the word which He commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac, and confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the allotment of your inheritance," when they were few in number, indeed very few, and strangers in it. When they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people, He permitted no one to do

them wrong; yes, He rebuked kings for their sakes, saying, "Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm."

The experience of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was that until they came to a personal knowledge of God by submitting to Him, they could not be active participants of the covenant blessing. Physical descent within the covenant family, and exposure to the influence and promises of God's blessing, did not automatically make them ready to be used by God. They had each "to call on the name of the LORD" before they were ready to be used by God.

The abiding lesson is that spiritual privileges count for nothing unless we have a faith that saves. Today, there are many who would regard themselves as Christians when, in fact, they are not yet born again. There is no concern in them to seek to know the Lord Jesus Christ, to secure salvation. They are only "Christian" in name, having been born into a Christian family, baptised by sprinkling when babies, brought to Sunday School when young, but who are not yet converted. There are others from non-Christian homes who attended meetings at which they were told to walk to the front of the church "to accept Jesus Christ", or to say "the Sinner's Prayer", without having been born of the Spirit of God. Such do not have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. They do not have the power of the Holy Spirit to serve God. Until you confess your sin to God and trust in Jesus Christ's blood to make you clean, you will not be able to serve God acceptably. You need to seek Jesus Christ until you find Him.

## 1.2 Looking Ahead At Jacob's Significance

### *The birth of Jacob*

We backtrack a little to Isaac. He seemed to have inherited Abraham's experience of having to wait long for a son. The problem was not in the men, nor in their wives. It was God's way of making them look to Him for an heir. It was God's way of focusing their attention on the line of descent that would lead to the coming of that one Seed who would be the Saviour of the world. Abraham waited more than 25 years after marriage for his son Isaac to be born. He was 75 years old when he left Haran (Gen. 12:4), and Sarah his wife was barren (Gen. 11:30). Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born (Gen. 21:5). Isaac waited 20 years after marriage before

his sons, Esau and Jacob, were born. Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebecca (Gen. 25:20). He was 60 years old when the twin boys were born (Gen. 25:26). The children were given by God through prayers. We are told in Genesis 25:20-21,

Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian. Now Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

Not all Christians get married. There are those who desire to be married but the circumstances of their lives do not permit it, or they have waited and searched for the right life partner in vain. You might say they had been too choosy, but they could have been faithful to God and had not found one who was converted, committed to the Lord, or compatible to themselves. Such brethren may be regarded as falling under the category of those the Lord calls, "eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake" (Matt. 19:12). Furthermore, not all marriages are blessed with children. Couples blessed with children should ever be so thankful to God. The way we show our gratitude to God is to bring up the children in the fear of the Lord. While salvation belongs to the Lord alone, God uses means to give conversion to our children.

It is at this point that we come to the birth of the twin boys – Esau and Jacob – described at the beginning of this chapter. The younger son was born with one hand holding on to his brother's heel. The mother, Rebecca, had a difficult time while carrying the babies. They seemed to be contending with one another even in the womb. She brought the matter before the LORD and received the reply (Gen. 25:23):

"Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger."

### *The character of Jacob*

Jacob grew up to be a mild mannered, homely man. He was obviously a very intelligent, observant, and thinking person. Sadly, he used his intelligence to get his own way, and to gain at the expense of others. There must have been many occasions when he pitted his

wits against his brother. He would have manipulated the parents to get his own ways. We have to read carefully what is recorded about them. We are told in Genesis 25:27-28,

So the boys grew. And Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

The occasion when Jacob bought over the birthright from Esau could not be the only time when he pitted his brains against others. This occasion is recorded because of its significance. Jacob knew the value of the birthright, which would entitle him to a double portion of the family inheritance, as taught in Deuteronomy 21:17. He had noted that Esau was so hungry and weary from that particular trip out hunting. Jacob dared to pitch the bargain that high – to exchange the bowl of red-bean soup for his brother's birthright. Esau, on his part, was not only weary and hungry but also dim-witted. He was not one who thought deeply and long-term. His concern was to fulfil his immediate desire for food. We are told that he despised his birthright, in Genesis 25:34.

It would be so sad to have a son, or daughter, like Esau. We can't help pitying him. He was later to lose the covenant blessing to Jacob. There are those who live only for immediate gratification – to satisfy fleshly lust, whether for wealth, sex, or fame. We are warned of the danger of falling short of the grace of God, in Hebrews 12:16-17,

...lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

There are intangible values more precious than the temporary things of this world – things like family honour, faithfulness, and a good name. Even more important are spiritual realities like peace with God, the certainty of entering heaven, and a sense of purpose as we serve the Lord. We do not want to live like Esau.

Our focus is on Jacob, however. He was so crafty and scheming. He had no qualms about offending others to gain from them. He brought so much pain to himself and to others. His name "Deceiver"

seemed to have reinforced this streak of deceitfulness in him in his growing years. His brother was to complain later (Gen. 36:27),

"Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!"

If it is sad to have a son like Esau, it will be a worry to have a son like Jacob. Perhaps, parents should be careful how they name their children. In some cultures, children are given bizarre names like "Ah Kow" or "Ah Gu" ('Dog' and 'Cow' in a Chinese dialect), "Big Head", and "Lucifer". Others give beautiful names expressing the aspiration of the parents for their children. Names might reinforce the characteristics in those who bear them, or embarrass them no end in their growing years. Back to Jacob, we note that he was a restless soul who was searching for what he did not know. The pain and troubles he brought upon himself and others must have made him miserable. He was like a piece of driftwood floating on the ocean waves, tossed about with no sense of direction nor purpose in life. God was going to transform this restless soul, and overrule his deceitfulness to fulfil a higher, divine, purpose. This is what we mean by "Taming Jacob". This restless trouble-maker was going to be transformed into a man at peace with his Maker, who would be a worthy bearer of the covenant blessing, till it was passed to the next generation.

We learn from this not to despair of wayward and difficult family members. If God could transform Jacob of the Old Testament, and Saul of the New Testament, He can transform your wayward son or daughter, father, or mother. You must pray for that difficult family member to experience the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

### *The covenant of grace*

The covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was in reality a revelation of the Covenant of Grace. What is the Covenant of Grace? It is the arrangement, or plan, by which God saves His people, by faith in the Saviour He has appointed. The covenant made with Abraham, which was passed on to Isaac, then to Jacob, then to the twelve sons of Jacob, revealed the Covenant of Grace. The revelation of the Covenant of Grace in the Old Testament is also known as the Old Covenant. The fulfilment of the promises made in the Old Covenant with the coming of the promised Saviour is known

as the New Covenant. Together, the Old Covenant and the New Covenant constitute the Covenant of Grace. The Covenant of Grace was revealed in the Old Covenant, but came into effect only with the death, resurrection, and glorification of the Lord Jesus Christ. During the Old Covenant period, the Saviour was still future. Abraham believed in the promised Saviour – a particular Seed of his – and was counted as righteous. This we are told in Romans 4:3, quoting Genesis 15:6, 'For what does the Scripture say? "*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*"' The temporal aspects of the Abrahamic covenant – including land, a nation, and circumcision – were types foreshadowing spiritual realities in the New Covenant age, including God's kingdom, church, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 4:17; 1 Pet. 2:9-10; Col. 2:11-12). As noted already, the temporal aspect of the Old Covenant would be fulfilled with the arrival of the promised Saviour, Jesus Christ. The nation of Israel would then cease to be God's covenant people, since the purpose for them to exist as such would have been fulfilled. The gospel would then be proclaimed to all nations, including the Jews, in the period of the New Covenant (or New Testament).

The Covenant of Grace revolves around the Seed of Abraham who is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ came and sealed the covenant by His death for His people. His blood was spilt for the cleansing of His people. We are told in Galatians 3:16,

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made.  
He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one,  
"And to your Seed," who is Christ.

We are then told in Galatians 3:26 & 29,

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus...  
And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and  
heirs according to the promise.

There is only one way by which God's elect are saved throughout history. It is by grace, through faith, in Christ, alone. This is illustrated in the salvation of Jacob, as made clear in Romans 9:10-16,

And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived  
by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not  
yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the  
purpose of God according to election might stand, not of

works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

We will have more to say about Jacob's salvation in the chapters following. For the moment, it suffices to say that Jacob's life shows us what is involved in true conversion, leading to the life of faith. His spiritual awakening took place when he had a personal encounter with God at Bethel (Gen. 28:16-22). God guided and moulded him until he submitted himself to the Lord, who appeared as a Man to wrestle with him at Peniel (Gen. 32:24-32). His experience shows the need of revelation from God, which centres around the truth of "Jesus Christ crucified", for there to be spiritual awakening and the new birth. We know that there are no more revelations from God by dreams and visions today. Instead, the will of God is to be determined from the Scripture. The Lord Jesus Christ alluded to Jacob's ladder, or staircase, in John 1:50-51,

Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man..."

In Romans 10:17, we learn of the need to hear the gospel for there to be salvation: "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

The Holy Spirit uses the preached word to give new life to the elect. Spiritual transformation comes by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. A nominal Christian – i.e. one who is only a Christian in name – will say and do the right thing, but without the inner conviction or power that comes from the Holy Spirit. Any discerning Christian will soon detect the absence of spiritual life in the person. We must ensure that we are truly born again.



## 1.3 Conclusion

We have looked back at Jacob's ancestry. We have also looked forward at Jacob's significance to us. Jacob was a restless soul who was self-centred and self-seeking. He was a stranger to God despite being brought up by believing parents. He was basically not at peace with God or men, with no clear sense of purpose or direction for life, and no clear sense of destiny. His life points us to the need for peace with God, which is to be sought by faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ says, in Matthew 11:28-30,

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.



## Genesis 27:1-46

1 Now it came to pass, when Isaac was old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see, that he called Esau his older son and said to him, "My son." And he answered him, "Here I am." 2 Then he said, "Behold now, I am old. I do not know the day of my death. 3 Now therefore, please take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me. 4 And make me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die."

5 Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt game and to bring it. 6 So Rebekah spoke to Jacob her son, saying, "Indeed I heard your father speak to Esau your brother, saying, 7 'Bring me game and make savory food for me, that I may eat it and bless you in the presence of the Lord before my death.' 8 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to what I command you. 9 Go now to the flock and bring me from there two choice kids of the goats, and I will make savory food from them for your father, such as he loves. 10 Then you shall take it to your father, that he may eat it, and that he may bless you before his death."

11 And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "Look, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth-skinned man. 12 Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be a deceiver to him; and I shall bring a curse on myself and not a blessing." 13 But his mother said to him, "Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me." 14 And he went and got them and brought them to his mother, and his mother made savory food, such as his father loved. 15 Then Rebekah took the choice clothes of her elder son Esau, which

were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. 16 And she put the skins of the kids of the goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. 17 Then she gave the savory food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.

18 So he went to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" 19 Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn; I have done just as you told me; please arise, sit and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me." 20 But Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" And he said, "Because the Lord your God brought it to me."

21 Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not." 22 So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." 23 And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him. 24 Then he said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He said, "I am." 25 He said, "Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son's game, so that my soul may bless you." So he brought it near to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank. 26 Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come near now and kiss me, my son."

27 And he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his clothing, and blessed him and said: "Surely, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed. 28 Therefore may God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. 29 Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be ev-

everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you!"

30 Now it happened, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. 31 He also had made savory food, and brought it to his father, and said to his father, "Let my father arise and eat of his son's game, that your soul may bless me." 32 And his father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" So he said, "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau." 33 Then Isaac trembled exceedingly, and said, "Who? Where is the one who hunted game and brought it to me? I ate all of it before you came, and I have blessed him—and indeed he shall be blessed." 34 When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me—me also, O my father!" 35 But he said, "Your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing." 36 And Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!" And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?"

37 Then Isaac answered and said to Esau, "Indeed I have made him your master, and all his brethren I have given to him as servants; with grain and wine I have sustained him. What shall I do now for you, my son?" 38 And Esau said to his father, "Have you only one blessing, my father? Bless me—me also, O my father!" And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. 39 Then Isaac his father answered and said to him: "Behold, your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above. 40 By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; and it shall come to pass, when you become restless, that you shall break his

yoke from your neck."

41 So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, "The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob." 42 And the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said to him, "Surely your brother Esau comforts himself concerning you by intending to kill you. 43 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice: arise, flee to my brother Laban in Haran. 44 And stay with him a few days, until your brother's fury turns away, 45 until your brother's anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereaved also of you both in one day?" 46 And Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like these who are the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?"

# Two

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## FAMILY FEUD

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When the police opens up a criminal case, the three areas focused upon are the professional, social and family lives of the individual under investigation. Similarly, in many corporate firms, the career paths of the employees are plotted by taking into consideration not only their professional aptitude, but also their social and family lives. A particular employee who is quite loose in social life might compromise company secrets. Another might work well alone but is not a team player. These factors are taken into consideration so that they are channelled to the appropriate career trajectories. The Bible's teaching should influence all aspects of our life – be it in church, at work, or in the family. A Christian who compartmentalises his life, allowing only his behaviour in church to be governed by the Bible while keeping his behaviour at work, or in the home, away from the influence of the Bible will be lopsided in his spiritual growth. Awkwardness in behaviour will become manifest, accompanied by apparent hypocrisy which cause others to doubt his character.

Jacob's otherwise prosperous family life was riddled with unhappiness. Instead of love and mutual care, there was sibling rivalry in his growing years, rivalry between his wives, and jealousy among his own children. Jacob's family life would seem to have lacked the undergirding of right principles. In the providence of God, this was the stage upon which the drama of God's dealings with him unfolded. Unhappiness marred the family life of this man of God. We shall follow his life in his growing years at home in Genesis 27, the rivalry between his wives in Genesis 30, and the jealousy among his children

in Genesis 37. The lesson we wish to draw out is that God's word should regulate our lives in an all-round manner – in the family, in church, and in our social life.

### 2.1 Unhealthy Favouritism

#### *The trials of favouritism*

Jacob and Esau were the subjects of unhealthy favouritism between their parents, resulting in much distress and unhappiness all round. We have seen that already in their growing years. We are told in Genesis 25:27-28,

So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

The mistake of showing favouritism toward the children was to play out tragically in the family. When Isaac was 137 years old, he thought the time was near for him to die. He did not know that he was to live another 43 years (Gen. 35:28). He wanted to pass on the covenant blessing to his son Esau, asking him to get ready by preparing a meal of savoury meat. While Esau was out to hunt game, his mother quickly schemed with Jacob to steal the covenant blessing. She coached Jacob to deceive his father by preparing savoury meat of the kids of the goats from their own flock instead of hunting for wild meat. Jacob's initial protest was overruled by his mother. Rebecca was showing lack of faith in God. It had been revealed to her that of the two sons she was carrying, "the older shall serve the younger (Gen. 25:23)." She needn't have schemed for Jacob to get the covenant blessing. She needn't have to deceive her own husband, and to involve her son in the grand scheme. God would have brought about the fulfilment of His promise without the aid of her earthly wisdom and her fleshly manipulation.

Blind Isaac doubted the voice of Jacob, who impersonated Esau. His weak old hands touched the hands of Jacob and found them hairy like those of Esau. He did not realise that those hands of Jacob had been covered by the skins of the kids of the goats which were slaughtered for the savoury meal. As Jacob drew near, Isaac smelled him and thought that he was Esau, not realising that Jacob had been



instructed by his mother to put on his brother's clothes. Isaac was taken in by the deception. He relied on his physical senses when his spirit told him otherwise. He passed on the covenant blessing to Jacob, thinking that he was Esau. Isaac, on his part, had not submitted to the will of God to have the younger son treated as the older. He, too, knew of the revelation of God concerning the two sons. In God's providence, the deception carried out by Rebecca and Jacob fulfilled the divine will. We cannot win, trying to resist God's will. This is not to say that God condoned the deception of Rebecca and Jacob, or the disobedient evasion of Isaac.

### *The price of favouritism*

We pause to note a few things. The trait of showing favouritism toward the children in Isaac and Rebecca was to show in Jacob in his relationship with his own children in later days. Just as unhappiness was the result, so also in the later generation. The immediate effects of Rebecca's scheming was that she and Jacob became entangled in a web of lies. The lies were in the actions, then in words. When asked by Isaac, "Are you really my son Esau?" Jacob answered, "I am." Another immediate effect was that this incurred the hatred of Esau against Jacob. Esau was livid over his own misfortune. He cried out (Gen. 27:36),

"Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!" And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?"

We have postulated that these couldn't have been the only two times when Jacob deceived Esau. The propensity to deceive was too much ingrained in him. All other deceptions of the past were nothing compared to these two, for not only was his temporal blessing as the firstborn taken away but this time the covenant blessing as well. Esau, on his part, forfeited the blessing of God because he was unworthy of it. We are told in Hebrews 12:16-17 that Esau was a profane person, "...who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears."

There were also long-term effects caused by the deception, which arose from the unhealthy favouritism seen in the family. Rebecca had

daringly taken upon herself any curse that might befall her son Jacob (Gen. 27:13). She saw it fit to deceive her own husband. She failed to trust in God to fulfil the promise that "the older shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23). When she heard her son Esau talking to himself in rage, "The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob (Gen. 27:41)", she quickly made up her mind to send Jacob away to her brother Laban in Syria for safety. She said to Jacob (Gen. 27:45-46),

"...stay with him a few days, until your brother's fury turns away, until your brother's anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereaved also of you both in one day?"

As events worked out, she never saw her son Jacob again. Jacob would be away twenty years, during which time she passed away.

Another long-term effect was the fact that Jacob had to suffer in the hands of his uncle Laban for a good twenty years. At the same time, there was intense rivalry between his two wives in the home, which caused tremendous heartache, which we will consider next. Rebecca's heart would have ached had she known what she was putting her son to.

It never pays to practise favouritism in the family. The present writer and his wife learned this lesson early, before being blessed with children. While in the United Kingdom, we were in the habit of observing how Christian parents raised up their children. We were constantly asking older people for advice. One godly couple taught us never to show favouritism to our children, but to love them equally. This was taught to our children, and shown in practice. If our children were asked who is the favourite child in the family, we expect them to say, "Our parents love us equally." It is to be noted, however, that loving our children equally does not mean giving them the same things each time, for they are at different stages of growth and their needs differ.

### 2.2 Unhealthy Rivalry Within Jacob's Family

#### *The trials of polygamy*

We will have occasion later to consider the trials that Jacob faced in

the hands of his uncle Laban. Here, we consider the rivalry between Jacob's two wives. Jacob loved the younger daughter of Laban, but was tricked into marrying the older daughter, Leah, instead. He then married the younger daughter, Rachel, as well. Laban was a prosperous man who could afford to give a maid to accompany each of his daughters. The intense rivalry between the two wives of Jacob, and involving the two maids, would have been an amusing soup opera if not for the tragic tension in the family. The tremendous heartache – and headache, we would say today – may be glimpsed from Genesis 30:1-2,

Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die!" And Jacob's anger was aroused against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"

The two wives also had to compete to have the husband sleep with them. Reuben, the son of Leah, found some mandrakes which was a plant supposed to have aphrodisiac or fertility inducing property. We read in Genesis 30:14-15,

Then Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." But she said to her, "Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?"

We cannot help feeling torn between wanting to laugh and wanting to cry, as we read of what transpired next (Gen. 30:15-16),

And Rachel said, "Therefore he will lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes." When Jacob came out of the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes." And he lay with her that night.

God's sovereignty in the life of Jacob must be noted. God used the unhappy rivalry in Jacob's family to fulfil His promise to Abraham that his descendants would multiply in Egypt before returning to occupy the promised land of Canaan. Abraham's descendants were to be from his son Isaac, followed by Jacob, and then the twelve sons

of Jacob, whose descendants would constitute the nation of Israel. This is recorded in the covenant God made with Abraham, in Genesis 15:12-16,

Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

On the human level, it would seem that a dose of heartaches and headaches, coupled with the need to bear responsibilities, would do some people good. At the same time, one would wish that right lessons are learned without having to undergo such pain. It might be argued that the situation was forced upon Jacob to have two wives, and two concubines, for he was tricked into marrying Leah. Be that as it may, God sovereignly used the situation to tame Jacob and to wean him off his selfishness and deceitfulness.

### *The price of polygamy*

Polygamy is always trying to the family. Many cultures still allow for the practice. You might come across a polygamous family that appear peaceful and happy, but do not be fooled by what appears on the surface. Examine the situation more closely and you will find that there is much unhappiness among the family members. This is not to claim that a monogamous marriage will always be happy. We are only pointing out that a polygamous marriage has problems peculiar to itself. We have encountered many such instances. It also raises difficulties that we have to wrestle with in our attempt to follow the Bible's teaching.

It needs to be noted that God tolerated polygamy in some notable servants of His in order to accomplish a higher purpose in them. God never condoned the polygamy in Abraham, David, or Solomon. In the case of King Solomon (1 Kings 11:3-4), we read that,

...he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David.

The New Testament speaks favourably of Solomon. We might even say that he was a type of Christ, i.e. someone who foreshadowed the coming of Christ, imperfect as he was (2 Sam. 12:24-25; Matt. 12:42). If God were to deal with all our sins at once we would long have been crushed under His condemnation. However, God is wise and longsuffering. He brings conviction of sin upon us and turns us to Himself – by faith in His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. When we are converted to Christ, many sins in our lives begin to drop off and we are transformed from one degree of holiness to another.

When the Lord was on earth, He re-established monogamy as the norm for His people (Matt. 19:5-6). It is not lawful for any man to have more than one wife, or for a woman to have more than one husband, at the same time. This becomes an issue when a person is converted from a polygamous situation. The approach adopted traditionally by missionaries and churches is to teach the newly converted man to live only with his first wife as the legitimate wife. He no longer lives together with his other wives, although continuing to sustain them and the children he has with them. The same applies to a woman who is converted from a polygamous background. She is no longer to live with the husband as his wife if she is not the first and, therefore, legitimate wife. Obviously, such situations have to be handled with great sensitivity and fairness, and might need time to sort things out.

The immediate application to us all is the need to guard our hearts from adultery. The Lord teaches us that adultery occurs when a man looks at a woman to lust for her (Matt. 5:28). This applies to a woman who lusts after a man as well. All such sins must be repented of. It must not constitute a habitual way of life. Those who aspire to hold office as an elder or a deacon in the church must clearly be a "one-woman man" (1 Tim. 3:2, 12). He may be in a monogamous marriage, but is he free from flirting with women? Is he free from a reputation of being a "playboy"?

Coming back to Jacob, we note that his polygamous marriage carried with it a heavy price, even though God overruled it to fulfil His greater purpose of giving Abraham many descendants. Unhappiness in family life will affect other aspects of our life. Young people especially must take note of the importance of having a happy family life. A happy family life does not necessarily mean a problem-free life. However, you would want God to bless your family life. Of course, it is possible to be wrong in the other extreme of idolising the family. Here, we are drawing out the lesson that the wellbeing of your family life will affect other aspects of your life.

### 2.3 Unhealthy Sibling Rivalry

#### *The trials of sibling rivalry*

Jacob did not seem to have learned from his own growing years, when his parents showed favouritism toward the children. He showered his love upon Joseph, and then upon Benjamin, the two sons born to him by his favourite wife Rachel. The death of Rachel, while giving birth to Benjamin, could possibly have driven him to focus more on these two sons (Gen. 35:16ff.). We are told in Genesis 37:3-4,

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

In the verse earlier, we are told that Joseph brought a bad report of his brothers to his father. Some preachers see this as a negative characteristic of Joseph, viz. that he was a telltale. This, however, needs to be seen in the light of Joseph being willing to be sent by his father to check on the welfare of his brothers and the flock, in Genesis 37:12-14,

Then his brothers went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers feeding the flock in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." So he said to him, "Here I am." Then he said to him, "Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with

the flocks, and bring back word to me." So he sent him out of the Valley of Hebron, and he went to Shechem.

What is clearly stated in verses 3-4 is that "...when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him." Favouritism caused sibling rivalry shown in jealousy, hatred, disunity, and acts of cruelty. They "hated him and could not speak peaceably to him".

The upshot of it all was that Joseph was sold off as a slave to Ishmaelite merchants passing by, on their way to Egypt (Gen. 37:25ff.). Jacob was cast down in severe grief, thinking that his son had been killed by a wild animal. Joseph became a slave in Egypt. God was with Joseph, however, so that he found favour with those he came into contact. In God's providence, he was destined to save lives. A severe famine came to the region, affecting not only Egypt but also the surrounding countries. Jacob's family was among those saved from certain death because Joseph had risen to become the prime minister of Egypt and was selling stored grain for food (Gen. 37:10-11; 45:4-8; 50:20).

It is so important for parents to set good examples at home. Isaac and Rebecca had set bad examples of showing favouritism to the children and resorting to deceit and lies to get their ways. Jacob, on his part, should have learned to reject what were bad while following what were good. Instead, he picked up the bad trait of showing favouritism among his sons, with dire consequences.

#### *The price of sibling rivalry*

Applying Bible truths to ourselves is not always pleasant. Sibling rivalry of sorts occur in the church, where all believers are brethren in the Lord. This often take the form of differences over doctrine, practice, and opinions. It is never good to be dogmatic over opinions because what we believe or feel about secondary matters are of no consequence to the faith – e.g. the food we like, the places we think safest, the hymn books we use, etc. Differences over doctrine and practice which have bearing on the faith should be settled by exposition of the Bible, for we are told in Isaiah 8:20, "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

New believers are often rattled by differences between brethren, and between churches. Older believers might not be so shaken, but

such differences may still have a negative impact on us. In Acts 15:1-2, we read of brethren from the church in Jerusalem coming to the church in Antioch to teach wrong doctrine. The church at Antioch had had to send Paul, Barnabas, and others to settle the matter with the church at Jerusalem. In Acts 15:36-41, we have Paul and Barnabas disagreeing over whether or not to allow John Mark to accompany them in their mission trip. The dissension was so sharp that they parted ways, with Paul taking Silas with him while Barnabas took John Mark, his cousin, with him. There are those who hail this disagreement as a victory of sorts because two missionary teams resulted from the one. The Bible, however, does not condone disunity between brethren. In this particular case, the approval of God was upon Paul for we read in Acts 15:40, "but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God." Barnabas is not mentioned again in the Scripture. Thankfully, John Mark grew to become useful for ministry to Paul in later years (2 Tim. 11).

In the Bible, even preachers rivalled one another. In the Old Testament, Elijah had to contend against the false prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:20-40), while Michaiah was challenged by the false prophet, Zedekiah (2 Chron. 18:1-27). In the New Testament, we have Paul saying this, in Philippians 1:15-17,

Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.

In the church at Corinth, sectarianism resulted when members of the church took differing sides with the preachers – Paul and Apollos – when, in fact, Paul was not in rivalry with Apollos (1 Cor. 3:1-8, 21-23). Preachers may differ in doctrine while remaining basically sound in the faith. Others may have gone astray to preach false doctrine. It is hard to say which are the causes and which the effects. The sense of rivalry may lead to jealousy, hatred, disunity, and acts of cruelty. These, in turn, may feed into rivalry so that a vicious cycle results. In Acts 20:30, Paul warns the Ephesian elders,



Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

In 2 Timothy 4:14-15, Paul says,

Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words.

In the church, watchfulness is needed so that we do not allow wrong teaching or a bad spirit among the members to disrupt the unity of the body. At the same time, we must strive for love and unity between the brethren. We are reminded of the blessedness of sweet fellowship between brethren, in Psalm 133:1, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

## 2.4 Conclusion

God's sovereignty in the life of Jacob does not mean that his sins and shortcomings are to be overlooked. We learn as much from the failings of others as from their strengths. Divine sovereignty does not nullify human depravity, as seen in the case of the Lord's death. We read in Acts 3:13-19 these words of Peter,

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out,

so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...

The cure for unhealthy rivalry, hatred, and disunity – at home, in the church, or at the place of work – is to "repent and be converted".

## Genesis 28:1-22

1 Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, and said to him: "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. 2 Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. 3 May God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of peoples; 4 and give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham."

5 So Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Padan Aram, to Laban the son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau. 6 Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan Aram to take himself a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan," 7 and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Padan Aram. 8 Also Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan did not please his father Isaac. 9 So Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had.

10 Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. 11 So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. 12 Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 And behold, the

Lord stood above it and said: "I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. 14 Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. 15 Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." 17 And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" 18 Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. 19 And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city had been Luz previously. 20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, 21 so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. 22 And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

# Three

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## SEEKING AFTER GOD

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A mother carrying a baby will have to wait a good nine months before he is born. The baby is alive from the moment of conception. He is protected in the mother's womb and continues to develop until ready to be born into the world. The period of gestation is like a person developing as a seeker after God, before being born again of the Holy Spirit into the kingdom of God. There is a point of conception, when the person is given spiritual life. This act of the Holy Spirit in giving spiritual life to the person has been called 'initial regeneration'.

There was a point in the life of Jacob when God implanted the seed of new life in him. That happened at a place called Luz, which he renamed Bethel – *House of God*. That event launched him off into a period of seeking after God, when he developed spiritually until he was finally born again of the Holy Spirit. We shall trace Jacob's spiritual pilgrimage from before that point in his life, for God was sovereignly guiding him long before he was aware of it. Is it not true that, once converted, we are able to look back over our lives and realise that God's hand had been upon us long before our conversion? God was sovereign over Jacob's life. Jacob was a restless soul who was changed into a seeking soul. He was obviously intelligent, but used his intelligence selfishly and in a worldly way. He made himself unpopular by seeking to gain at others' expense. He got himself into trouble, but God was graciously guiding him to faith.

Jacob's experience shows that peace and happiness will elude us as long as we are self-centred and seek to gain at others' expense. It

is when God sovereignly transforms us to seek after Him that there is hope of finding true peace and happiness.

## 3.1 God In Control Of Lives

### *Divine sovereignty*

Jacob's life must be understood in the light of God's sovereign control in human lives. We are told in Psalm 71:6,

By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb. My praise shall be continually of You.

We read in Isaiah 44:2 & 24,

Thus says the Lord who made you and formed you from the womb, who will help you... Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, and He who formed you from the womb: "I am the Lord, who makes all things, who stretches out the heavens all alone, who spreads abroad the earth by Myself..."

Just as Isaac's birth was in accordance to God's will, so also Jacob's. We have seen that God determined that, between Esau and Jacob, "the older shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23). God was in control of the situation when Jacob bought over Esau's birthright, and when Rebecca and Jacob schemed to get the covenant blessing. God's sovereignty, however, did not absolve Rebecca and Jacob of their wrongs. This is where we see human responsibility subsumed under divine sovereignty – God is in absolute control over everything in such a way as to involve total human responsibility. Often, the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility is stated as an 'antinomy' – two truths held in tension, which constitutes a seeming contradiction that cannot be understood. We would rather say that human responsibility is subsumed – placed under, included in – divine sovereignty. There is no tension between the two truths. God holds man fully responsible for his actions, yet He is in control over the actions and the outcome of those actions, to fulfil His higher purpose.

We see this truth in operation in a number of instances in the Bible. When Moses sought Pharaoh to allow God's people to go out of Egypt, Pharaoh hardened himself. Yet, it was also God who hardened him (Exod. 8:15, 32 cf. Exude. 9:12; 10:1, 20). When Satan instigated King David to number Israel, it was the Lord who allowed that to happen (1 Chron. 21:1 cf. 2 Sam. 24:1). It was Satan who instigated Judas to betray the Lord, causing Him to be put to death. Yet, it was the Lord who willingly laid down His life to fulfil God's plan of salvation for His people (John 13:27; 17:22 cf. John 3:14; 10:17-18). The apostle Peter, in his sermon, held the Jews responsible for the Lord's death at the same time that he pointed out it was all in accordance to God's will (Acts 3:14-15, 17-18),

But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life... Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled...

God is never the author of sin. Yet, in His providence, all things happen to fulfil His purpose. At the same time, we must behave responsibly. We do need to plan and make decisions, while saying to ourselves, "God willing" when we take any action. This is how true faith behaves.

#### *Divine purpose*

The higher purpose of God in Jacob's life must be noted. Jacob was wrong to have deceived his brother and father, to steal the covenant blessing. The covenant blessing would have come to him in God's time, for it was already promised by God. By wresting it from Esau, he incurred the wrath of his brother. Esau, on his part, had proved himself unworthy of the birthright and the covenant blessing. We read in Genesis 28:6-9,

Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan Aram to take himself a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan," and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Padan Aram. Also Esau saw that the daughters

of Canaan did not please his father Isaac. So Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had.

Esau had already married two Canaanite wives, which caused grief to his parents (Gen. 26:34-35). Some scholars see Esau's action of taking for himself an Ishmaelite wife an attempt to make amends to ingratiate himself to his father. A better way of seeing this incident is that Esau was deliberately rubbing salt into the wound, for he knew that the descendants of Ishmael were as much aliens to Israel as were the Canaanites (cf. Gen. 17:19-22; 37:27-28). Esau knew that the covenant blessing given to Jacob could not be reversed (Gen. 27:33, 37). He was not trying to change his father's mind about the covenant blessing. Rather, he was trying to hurt his parents for his loss of the covenant blessing. Esau was unworthy to receive God's blessing.

Those who desire to be used by the Lord must prove themselves worthy. At the same time, we must learn to be content with the work that God has given us to do. In the Parable of the Talents, the five-talent-man produced five more talents, while the two-talent-man produced two more talents. The two-talent-man was not expected to produce five talents. What is important is that we must not have the attitude of the one-talent-man, who buried the talent in the ground and said to the master (Matt. 25:24),

'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.'

We should rather have the attitude of John Mark, who although failing the first time in missions, developed to become useful for ministry to Paul in later years (Acts 13:13; 15:36-41; 2 Tim. 4:11). Beware of having high thoughts of yourselves! Be content with the abilities and opportunities God has given to you. At the same time, learn to be faithful in little, and you will develop to become faithful in much.

In the interactions between the individuals in the family of Jacob, God was revealing the way of salvation for sinners. Acceptance



with God is not found in our effort and struggles to become better. Instead, it is given "by grace, through faith, in Christ alone". That it is by grace, and not gained by human merit, is taught in Romans 9:10-15,

And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."

That salvation is *by faith in Christ alone* is taught in Galatians 3:16, 26, & 29,

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ... For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus... And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Understanding divine sovereignty in the salvation of souls inspires a burden for souls to be saved. It leads to zeal in evangelism, and the desire to build up the church of Jesus Christ. It is as we trust the Lord while we act that God works mightily in us to accomplish His purpose. The apostle Paul expresses this truth in Colossians 1:28-29, concerning his preaching of the gospel,

Him [Christ] we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

## 3.2 God Reveals The Way Of Salvation

### *Response to divine initiative*

We have considered how God was working in the life of Jacob. We now see how He takes the initiative to draw Jacob to Himself. That God takes the initiative to draw sinners to Himself is taught by the Lord in John 6:44, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." Jacob was running away from Esau, and heading to Syria to seek out his uncle, Laban. At Luz, he placed a stone under his head to sleep. Sleeping sideways would not be possible on a hard stone. Facing upwards in his sleep, Jacob was a picture of one who was made to look upwards to consider his relationship with God, instead of merely looking at things on the horizontal plane. He dreamed of a ladder, or staircase, connecting earth to heaven, and angels were ascending and descending on it. The LORD stood above it and said (Gen. 28:13-15),

"I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

Jacob's response shows that he was new to such divine revelation. He awoke and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." We are reminded of young Samuel who heard the Lord's voice calling to him and he did not know it. Old Eli had to teach him to respond by saying, "Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears (1 Sam. 3:9)." While Isaac and Rebecca had experience of hearing the voice of the Lord, Jacob was new to this (cf. Gen. 25:23). We are told that he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven (Gen. 28:17)!"

God was making a covenant with Jacob. The words of God to him were words of the covenant He had made with Abraham. The

covenant blessing had been passed down to Isaac, and then to Jacob. But it had not been ratified by God until this point in time. A covenant is a formal agreement between two or more parties. While God is the One who took the initiative to make this covenant, it had to be responded to by Jacob. And respond he did for he took the stone that he had put under his head to set it as a pillar, and poured oil on it. He then made a vow to God.

A covenant requires the agreement and affirmation of the parties concerned. Today, a marriage covenant requires the man and the woman to make an oath to one another and, in the case of Christians, they also make their vows to God. It cannot be that one party agrees to the terms and conditions of a covenant while the other party keeps silent. In the New Testament age, the local church is a community of God's people who have entered into a covenant with one another and with God (1 Cor. 6:16 - 7:3; 2 Cor. 8:5; Heb. 8:7-13). This is what has been called a church covenant. The Reformation of the 16th century recovered not only many important doctrines of the Bible but also the idea of the church covenant. When new churches were founded, the members entered into a covenant with one another and with God. Strangely, this practice was lost to many churches after the Reformation, until recovered in some churches of the Reformed tradition today.

On the personal level, church members must be reminded of the privileges, responsibilities, and liabilities of church membership. We need to take our church covenant more seriously than is commonly seen among Christians today.

#### *Response to divine revelation*

Jacob's personal encounter with God at Luz turned him into a seeker after the things of God. The seed of spiritual life was implanted in him, but he was not yet converted. His words of affirmation to the covenant with God show that he was not only new to spiritual experiences but also quite self-centred still. He said in his vow (Gen. 28:20-22),

"If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. And this stone which I

have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

In his ignorance, he was making a bargain with God and focusing on his own needs. Until he was converted later, he was not ready to be used as the bearer of the divine covenant. God was going to wean this self-centred man off his worldliness and to give him a thorough conversion.

At this point, it needs to be noted that there is some controversy among Christians over what is called "the order of salvation". There have been those who claim that the work of the Holy Spirit in implanting new life in the elect is an instantaneous event that produces the new birth. Theologically speaking, it is claimed that regeneration by the Holy Spirit leads instantaneously to conversion, that is, to repentance and faith and, therefore, to new life in Christ. This view does not allow for regeneration to be drawn out in time, in which the person concerned becomes a seeker after God while he is not converted yet. In contrast, the view advocated here is that the implantation of the seed of new life in the person by the Holy Spirit is instantaneous, much like conception in physical birth. It leads to the period in which the person is a seeker, corresponding to the gestation of the foetus in the womb. The Holy Spirit continues to work in the person, causing spiritual growth until he is ready to experience conversion, leading to the consciousness that he is forgiven of His sins and accepted as a child of God. The whole process – from the implantation of spiritual life to being awakened to spiritual needs, and then to repentance and faith – is called "regeneration", which is the work of the Holy Spirit.

This view of the order of salvation helps us to understand what was happening to Jacob's life. Rather than seeing his experience at Luz as his conversion, we see it as his awakening to spiritual realities. What God had begun in him would be brought to completion. There were many trials ahead of him. The trials would be used by God to wean him off self while making him more and more conscious of his need for God's blessing. Jacob's experience corresponds to the fourth category of soil in the Parable of the Sower, or of the Soils (Matt. 13:18-23). This is often applied to those who profess faith in Christ. When examined more closely, the fourth category of soil received the seed of the word well. The seed put in root and grew well despite tribulation or persecution. These are believers

who persevere in the faith because they have deep spiritual roots. In other words, they have genuine faith which bear spiritual fruit. There was a time when the seed was hidden in the ground, gestating until shoots finally burst forth above the ground. Jacob was at this stage of spiritual development after his encounter with God at Luz. Spiritual life had been implanted in him. He was awakened to spiritual realities, but he had not professed faith yet. There were many struggles he had to undergo before finally coming to faith at Peniel.

While there might be controversy over one matter, there is certainty over another. God was making it known to Jacob in his dream that he needed a vertical relationship with God in his life. Jacob's life up to this point had been focused on the horizontal dimension, i.e. between men, and concerning temporal things. He was now directed to spiritual and eternal issues. The staircase in the dream connected earth to heaven. Angels were ascending and descending on it, busily serving the Creator. When the Lord Jesus Christ was on earth, He told Nathaniel (John 1:51),

"Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

This appears to be a reference to the staircase in Jacob's dream. The Lord was claiming that He was Himself the bridge between earth and heaven. In Him is the revelation of God's will. For anyone to know God, he must have Jesus Christ as the Mediator. The Lord says in John 14:6 & 9,

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me... He who has seen Me has seen the Father."

A prolonged period of struggle with sin and unbelief will end with faith in Jesus Christ for God's elect. This has been the experience of many a children of God. John Bunyan was awakened to spiritual needs by overhearing a group of women talking about their spiritual experiences. He was converted over a year later. C. H. Spurgeon was for years miserable over his sins, believing he was lost. He was converted one winter day when he heard an odd stand-in preacher calling upon his hearers to look to Jesus Christ to be saved. The

Chinese evangelist, John Sung, had a chequered period of struggle over the claims of science and faith, and also with mental health, before coming to peace with God. Whether long or short, a period of spiritual seeking and struggle before conversion, like that of Saul of Tarsus, appears to be more commonly encountered than the placid and almost instantaneous conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26 - 9:22).

The question might be asked whether it is possible for an elect of God to die while awakened spiritually, without coming to faith in Christ. The answer has to be that God will not allow any of the elect to be lost. If He has begun a work of regeneration in the person, He will bring it to completion before his death. "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6)." The truth of John 10:27-28 applies as much to those who have come to faith as to those who are awakened to spiritual realities:

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

### 3.3 Conclusion

God is sovereign in salvation, from the beginning to the end. Long before we seek Him, He draws us and guides our steps to Himself. The time comes when the word of God awakens us spiritually, leading us into a period of seeking to know Him. That period may be long or short. It may be placid or tumultuous. It always ends with faith in Jesus Christ, for those who belong to God.

## **Genesis 21:15-28; 31:22-42**

### **Genesis 21:15-28**

15 Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what should your wages be?" 16 Now Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 Leah's eyes were delicate, but Rachel was beautiful of form and appearance. 18 Now Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter." 19 And Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man. Stay with me." 20 So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her.

21 Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in to her." 22 And Laban gathered together all the men of the place and made a feast. 23 Now it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. 24 And Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid. 25 So it came to pass in the morning, that behold, it was Leah. And he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?" 26 And Laban said, "It must not be done so in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. 27 Fulfill her week, and we will give you this one also for the service which you will serve with me still another seven years." 28 Then Jacob did so and fulfilled her week. So he gave him his daughter Rachel as wife also. 29 And Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as a maid. 30 Then Jacob also went in to Rachel, and he also loved Rachel more than Leah. And he served with Laban still another seven years.

### **Genesis 31:22-42**

22 And Laban was told on the third day that Jacob had fled. 23 Then he took his brethren with him and pursued him for seven days' journey, and he overtook him in the mountains of Gilead. 24 But God had come to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said to him, "Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad." 25 So Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mountains, and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mountains of Gilead.

26 And Laban said to Jacob: "What have you done, that you have stolen away unknown to me, and carried away my daughters like captives taken with the sword? 27 Why did you flee away secretly, and steal away from me, and not tell me; for I might have sent you away with joy and songs, with timbrel and harp? 28 And you did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters. Now you have done foolishly in so doing. 29 It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.' 30 And now you have surely gone because you greatly long for your father's house, but why did you steal my gods?"

31 Then Jacob answered and said to Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I said, 'Perhaps you would take your daughters from me by force.' 32 With whom-ever you find your gods, do not let him live. In the presence of our brethren, identify what I have of yours and take it with you." For Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them. 33 And Laban went into Jacob's tent, into Leah's tent, and into the two maids' tents, but he did not find them. Then he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's tent. 34 Now Rachel had taken the household idols, put them in the camel's saddle, and sat on them. And Laban searched all about the tent but



did not find them. 35 And she said to her father, "Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise before you, for the manner of women is with me." And he searched but did not find the household idols.

36 Then Jacob was angry and rebuked Laban, and Jacob answered and said to Laban: "What is my trespass? What is my sin, that you have so hotly pursued me? 37 Although you have searched all my things, what part of your household things have you found? Set it here before my brethren and your brethren, that they may judge between us both! 38 These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock. 39 That which was torn by beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. 40 There I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes. 41 Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. 42 Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked you last night."



## Four

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### WEANED OFF SELF

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When Jacob came to live and work for Laban, he met his match in a man just as deceitful as, and even more ruthless than, himself. Laban was his elder in the family, older in age, and had more experience in business dealings. He was on home ground, whereas Jacob was a visitor. Jacob had fallen in love with the pretty Rachel upon arrival in Syria. He was prepared to go the extra mile to gain the hand of Rachel, while Laban was the father of the prospective bride who held the bargaining chip. Laban was going to squeeze every drop of service from Jacob until it hurt. In the providence of God, this was going to be used to wean Jacob off self-trust so that he learned to trust in God instead.

Was the experience of Jacob under the hands of Laban the sanctification of a converted man, or was it the struggle of a seeker who had yet to know God? We are of the view that the latter is the correct understanding of Jacob's experience. He was a seeker who had not yet come to faith, that is, to full trust in God. Another experience encountered later at Peniel, where he wrestled with the Lord and prevailed, was to be his conversion experience. This latter experience had long-term spiritual impact upon his life, in connection with the covenant blessing that was passed to him and which had to be passed on to the next generation. It was at Peniel that his name was changed to "Israel", meaning *Prince with God* – the name that would be used also by the nation that came from his loins.

Taking this understanding of Jacob's experience between Bethel and Peniel, it would be seen that Jacob was, as it were, developing

spiritually in the womb until he was ready to be born into the kingdom of God. His was going to be a thorough conversion when the time came. Meanwhile, he was being forged under the fire of the Holy Spirit to become a true "Prince with God". We learn from this that a thorough and sound conversion is to be sought, regardless of how long it takes. While regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit, the word of God is used as the means. Preachers and other spiritual counsellors are used by God as instruments who apply the word to the seeking soul. We are the midwives used by God to help in the gestation period, until the baby is born. The baby might develop in a breech position, in which case the midwife will attempt to turn him into the right position. Or he might have the umbilical cord twined around his neck, in which case more drastic intervention would be needed. The aim is to be useful instruments in the hand of God, to help the seeker in his growing understanding of spiritual matters.

### 4.1 Serving Fourteen Years For His Wives

*Welcomed!*

After the initial welcome given by Laban to Jacob, the host quickly came to the subject of long-term sustenance in his abode. Here was a straight-talking man who would come to the point without unnecessary delay. Wasn't he happy to see his nephew? Of course, he was happy enough, as far as the narrative goes (Gen. 29:13-14),

Then it came to pass, when Laban heard the report about Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. So he told Laban all these things. And Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh." And he stayed with him for a month.

One month was long enough to welcome a close relative, but not for any longer. Laban wasn't going to be burdened with an extra mouth to feed. The delicate subject was now broached (Gen. 29:15),

Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what should your wages be?"

Being in love with Rachel, Jacob did not hesitate to set the term of seven years' service to win her hand. He specifically mentioned the name of Rachel (Gen. 29:18), "I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter." Shouldn't Jacob have allowed Laban to set the terms and then negotiated from there? Love for Rachel appeared to have blinded his discretion. Laban readily accepted, saying, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man. Stay with me." We are further told (Gen. 29:19),

So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her.

Should Jacob have insisted on putting the agreement between them in writing? Were there witnesses present at the time of their agreement? While not all things should be put down in writing, there are formal and important occasions or events that require the backup of signed documents. We learn from the apostle John that there are occasions when things are better not put down in writing (2 John 12 cf. 3 John 13),

Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.

On the other hand, there are occasions when a signed document is necessary, which is the accepted practice in any serious undertaking. An example may be seen in the nation of Judah covenanting together, in Nehemiah 9:38 -10:1, when the covenant was written down and signed.

#### *Deceived!*

As events unfolded, Jacob was tricked into marrying Leah, the older daughter of Laban. Jacob discovered this only on the morning after the wedding night. His protest was to the point (Gen. 29:25),

"What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?"

Jacob the Deceiver had been deceived! His uncle's reply was (Gen. 29:26-27),

"It must not be done so in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Fulfill her week, and we will give you this one also for the service which you will serve with me still another seven years."

Jacob married Rachel a week later, and had to serve Laban another seven years for her. Laban was not a man of his words. His intention from the start was to deceive Jacob. He covered up his lack of integrity with the excuse of the accepted practice of his culture. He was no different from many a Christian today who would use culture as the excuse for their unbiblical practices. Have we not encountered many such situations? While giving due allowance for cultural sensitivities we are, ultimately speaking, 'the people of the Book'. In our actions, we should be Christians first before taking culture into consideration. The Bible is our sole authority in all matters of faith and practice.

We have noted that the culture of the time was that a man could have more than one wife. God tolerated the practice in His people without approving of it, as He had a higher purpose to fulfil through them. The Lord Jesus re-established the rule for Christians, namely that a man should not have more than one wife, and a woman should not have more than one husband, at the same time (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5-6). We have noted also that Jacob went through a rough time maintaining his two wives and putting up with the rivalry between them. We are reminded of Proverbs 27:15-16,

A continual dripping on a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike; whoever restrains her restrains the wind, and grasps oil with his right hand.

This was no one-off incident but a continual affair under the same roof. This was not just one contentious woman, but two. The family quarrel was used by God as part of the process of teaching Jacob to be patient, to be sensitive to the feelings of others, and to bring all his trials to God in prayer. God's hand is in all aspects of life – whether one's professional, social, or family life. We have a responsibility to act biblically under all circumstances. The same may be said of the church where we must, all the more, be careful to act biblically and responsibly while trusting the Lord under all circumstances.

## 4.2 Serving Six Years For The Flock

### *Breaking silence*

After the long years of working hard and building up a large family, but with no savings, Jacob knew it was time to renegotiate the terms of his service with Laban. He came to Laban and said (Gen. 30: 25-30),

"Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my country. Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you know my service which I have done for you."

Jacob was playing his cards carefully. Laban knew that Jacob was a good worker, and God's blessing had spilled over to him on account of Jacob. He was reluctant to let Jacob go and acknowledged it, saying (Gen. 30: 27-28),

"Please stay, if I have found favor in your eyes, for I have learned by experience that the Lord has blessed me for your sake." Then he said, "Name me your wages, and I will give it."

Jacob, on his part, thought that providing for his family through working with Laban was better than leaving without anything. His proposal was to be paid with all the speckled and spotted sheep and goats, and all the brown lambs (30:32). But before the agreement could be carried out, Laban removed such animals far away, leaving Jacob with nothing to start off with. We are told in Genesis 30:34-36,

And Laban said, "Oh, that it were according to your word!" So he removed that day the male goats that were speckled and spotted, all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had some white in it, and all the brown ones among the lambs, and gave them into the hand of his sons. Then he put three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks.

### *Getting his own back!*

Sneaky man that he was, this Laban! And how brazen and ruthless!

He was deceiving Jacob again. He was not a man of his words. His behaviour was consistent with what we have known of him. God might be on his lips, but the fear of God was not in his heart. Given a choice, one should avoid associating too closely with such characters. Apart from marriage, business partnership should be examined in this light. More so, gospel work should not involve nominal Christians. Missionaries have engaged unbelievers as porters, builders, and helpers in translation, but they are never engaged to teach God's word. We are told in 2 Corinthians 6:14-15,

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?

How did Jacob react in the situation? Jacob patiently worked hard, while trusting in God to help him. Combining hard work with a clever process of selective breeding, Jacob built up his property of speckled, spotted and brown sheep and goats. He would set aside the speckled, spotted and brown sheep, and goats, to breed between themselves so as to produce more of such kids. Furthermore, he had learned that the sap of the green poplar, almond and chestnut trees possessed some stimulant which dissolved in the water causing the animals to be in heat when they came to drink. Jacob was using his intelligence to counter his crafty uncle. He became exceedingly prosperous. His faith in God was growing. We see him giving all the credit to God for his success in Genesis 31:7 & 9,

...your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me. ...So God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me.

Jacob emerged stronger in character – more patient, persevering in the faith, trusting in God. The time was near for him to be born into God's kingdom.

While we are thankful to God for whatever material blessing, we should be more thankful for the training of our character. Parents should give attention to the development of their children's character instead of focusing only on their academic achievement.



## 4.3 Serving Twenty Years To Know God

### *Incurring displeasure*

As Jacob became more prosperous, Laban and his sons were no longer happy with him. We are told in Genesis 31:1-2,

Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has acquired all this wealth." And Jacob saw the countenance of Laban, and indeed it was not favorable toward him as before.

It was at this time that God made it known to him it was time to leave (Gen. 31:3):

Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you."

When Jacob had wanted to leave six years earlier, it was not God's time for him to do so (Gen. 30:25). It is important that we seek God's will in important decisions such as moving home. Moving involves taking our family away from church and Christian fellowship. It disrupts the schooling of our children and uproots them from their friends. We would need to ensure that there is a good church in the vicinity of where we are moving to.

Jacob revealed to his wives how Laban had intended him harm and changed his wages many times. He said (Gen. 31:7),

And you know that with all my might I have served your father. Yet your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me.

The "ten times" is a term that means "many times", just as "the world has gone after Him" means "very many people have gone after Him" (John 12:19) and "to give double honour" means "to give abundance of honour" (1 Tim. 5:17). God had appeared to him in a dream and revealed that it was the right time to return to the land of his parents. Jacob gave a thorough and convincing account of how Laban had unfairly treated him and how God had intervened. His wives were whole-heartedly with him as they planned to leave. How good it is to be able to convince those under our care of the rightness

of a decision, not only in the family, but also in the church. While there is the danger of making rash decisions, there is also the danger of disobeying God's will and allowing gospel opportunities to be lost.

*Pursued!*

Laban was intending to harm Jacob when he and his men pursued the fleeing man and his family. God intervened to warn Laban in a dream not to harm Jacob. That, of course, did not mean that Laban was a believer. His words in Genesis 31:29 must be noted,

It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.'

He referred to God as "the God of your father", showing that Jacob's God was not his God. The occasion gave Jacob the opportunity to give Laban a mouthful of what he thought of him. How satisfying it must have been for Jacob! He set the record straight with his uncle (Gen. 31:41-42),

"...Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked you last night."

Jacob and Laban made a covenant not to harm each other. Again, the words used must be noted (Gen. 31:51-53),

Then Laban said to Jacob, "Here is this heap and here is this pillar, which I have placed between you and me. This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us." And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac. Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread. And they ate bread and stayed all night on the mountain.

While Laban linked the God of Abraham to the syncretism of their ancestors, Jacob swore by the name of the true God. Contact between Abraham's family in Canaan and Mesopotamia appeared to have ended at this point. It had taken Jacob twenty years to learn to trust in the one true God of Abraham and Isaac.

We see from the experience of Jacob that the trials in life are used by God to wean us off trusting in self, in order to trust in Him. We are reminded of Romans 8:28,

We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

We learn also the truth of Romans 8:31-32, & 37,

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ...Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Jacob served Laban a total of twenty years. Laban was prevented from harming Jacob. The years of being cheated by Laban did not break Jacob's spirit. The trials in the family did not cause Jacob to lose heart. He emerged through trials a spiritually stronger person – and one purer in character, ready to be used by his God.

## 4.4 Conclusion

Jacob was now poised to have a personal encounter with God, leading to a new phase of life. It had taken him fourteen years to pay for his wives, six years to earn his flock, and twenty years to be weaned off self to trust in God. Jacob lived up to 147 years old. The average lifespan as determined by God for us today is seventy-five years (Psalm 90:10). If we live up to seventy-five years old, ten years is proportionately the time we should take to learn the lesson Jacob learned.

The main lesson for us is that our conversion should be genuine and deep, however long it takes for that to happen. Ideally, we would

like to see sound conversion taking place in a shorter time. However, it is tragic to see long-standing professing believers with questionable faith, as seen from their lives. Those of us who preach the gospel can only play the role of the midwife, to help in the birthing of the baby. We should not attempt to cause the baby to be born out of due time, by extracting a profession of faith from those we are helping when they are not ready to be born. Salvation is of the Lord.

## **Genesis 32:22 - 33:20**

### **Genesis 32:22-32**

22 And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. 23 He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. 24 Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. 25 Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. 26 And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"

27 So He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob." 28 And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." 29 Then Jacob asked, saying, "Tell me Your name, I pray." And He said, "Why is it that you ask about My name?" And He blessed him there. 30 So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." 31 Just as he crossed over Peniel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip. 32 Therefore to this day the children of Israel do not eat the muscle that shrank, which is on the hip socket, because He touched the socket of Jacob's hip in the muscle that shrank.

### **Genesis 33:1-22**

1 Now Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and there, Esau was coming, and with him were four hundred men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maidservants. 2 And he put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children behind, and Rachel and Joseph last. 3 Then he crossed over before them and bowed him-

self to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

4 But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. 5 And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, "Who are these with you?" So he said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." 6 Then the maidservants came near, they and their children, and bowed down. 7 And Leah also came near with her children, and they bowed down. Afterward Joseph and Rachel came near, and they bowed down.

8 Then Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company which I met?" And he said, "These are to find favor in the sight of my lord." 9 But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." 10 And Jacob said, "No, please, if I have now found favor in your sight, then receive my present from my hand, inasmuch as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me. 11 Please, take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough." So he urged him, and he took it.

12 Then Esau said, "Let us take our journey; let us go, and I will go before you." 13 But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are weak, and the flocks and herds which are nursing are with me. And if the men should drive them hard one day, all the flock will die. 14 Please let my lord go on ahead before his servant. I will lead on slowly at a pace which the livestock that go before me, and the children, are able to endure, until I come to my lord in Seir." 15 And Esau said, "Now let me leave with you some of the people who are with me." But he said, "What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord." 16 So Esau

returned that day on his way to Seir. 17 And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, built himself a house, and made booths for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

18 Then Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan Aram; and he pitched his tent before the city. 19 And he bought the parcel of land, where he had pitched his tent, from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money. 20 Then he erected an altar there and called it El Elohe Israel.





# Five

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## RESTITUTION, REDEMPTION, AND RECONCILIATION

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A baby in the womb takes about nine months of gestation before he is ready to be born into the world. By then, the body parts of the baby are mature enough to function on their own. The baby had relied on the mother's blood to provide nutrients through the umbilical cord. Once born, he will be breathing through his lungs and sucking milk by himself. Jacob was at the stage when, spiritually speaking, he was ready to be born into the kingdom of God. This was shown by three significant events that occurred around that point of his life, namely Restitution, Redemption and Reconciliation. His conscience was tender as he considered how badly he had wronged his brother Esau. He was now ready to pluck up courage to make amends with him. He underwent a personal encounter with the LORD which changed his life forever, launching him into a new phase in which he walked with his God. He was reconciled with his brother, but also with his God so that his priority laid with the latter.

Together, these events show that Jacob at last came to personal faith in God and was able to put the past behind him, while beginning a new phase of life in the service of the Lord. God had been with him all along, but it was from this point that he consciously cultivated his walk with Him. The three R's – Restitution, Redemption, and Reconciliation – show the blessedness of knowing the Lord's

presence in our lives. Here, of course, we are speaking of having a living relationship with God, and not a mere academic knowledge about God.

### 5.1 Restitution Made To Esau

#### *Taking the initiative*

Twenty year had passed since Jacob left home. He couldn't have forgotten the reason why he left home. It was because he had offended his brother Esau so grievously that the latter had wanted to kill him. In his years of growth in spiritual sensitivity, his conscience would have been aroused with regard to this matter. How it must have weighed upon him! Those who are spiritually alive, whether before experiencing conversion or after that, will generally show this characteristic. The sins we have committed come back to haunt us, causing much heart-searching and distress of soul. At conversion, these would be among the sins we confess to God. There will be a desire to want to put things right when that is possible. Sadly, that is not always possible, for circumstances might have changed and perhaps the people we have offended are no more around. Thankfully, we know that there is full forgiveness for our sins in the blood of Jesus Christ. The teaching of Scripture on the need to make restitution where that is possible is clear. We are told in Matthew 25:23-24 (which must be compared with Luke 19:8 and Exodus 22:1-14),

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Jacob took the initiative to seek reconciliation with his brother by sending emissaries to him with clear instruction what to say to him (Gen. 32:3-5),

Then Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, "Speak thus to my lord Esau, 'Thus your servant Jacob says: "I have dwelt with Laban and stayed there until now. I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and

male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord,  
that I may find favor in your sight." ' ' "

However, upon hearing that Esau was coming with four hundred men, Jacob was terrified and turned to God in prayer, in these words (Gen. 32:9-12),

"O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the Lord who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you': I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children. For You said, 'I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'"

This is the first recorded prayer of Jacob ever since his encounter with God at Bethel, en route to Laban. At that time, his prayer was self-centred and partook of bargaining with God (Gen. 28:20-22),

"If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

We notice that, this time, his prayer showed maturity in understanding and there is a ring of heart-rending urgency to it. He acknowledged his own anxiety, claimed God's covenant promise, and confessed his own unworthiness.

#### *Making restitution*

Jacob went to great length to appease his brother. He was fearful that his family might be harmed by Esau. At the same time, he was prepared to make a generous gift to his brother for all the pain and hardship he had caused to him. He was, as it were, taking the bull

by its horns. He was trusting in God, at the same time that he was ready to accept the consequences of his sins. Is that not the nature of true repentance? He set aside five hundred and fifty of his animals (Gen. 33:8-10 cf. 32:13-21), arranged them in three droves, and instructed his servants to announce clearly to Esau that it was a gift to him from Jacob as he came to each drove. The gift was not only generous but also willingly given because, firstly, God had generously blessed him and secondly, Jacob was now a changed man. Jacob freely acknowledged that God had blessed him with children and animals when Esau asked him later, saying, in the words of Genesis 33:5 & 11,

"The children whom God has graciously given your servant. ...Please, take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough."

Jacob was now a changed man who not only took the initiative to be reconciled with his brother but was pleased also to see that God had changed his brother from being hateful to being loving. He said, in Genesis 33:10,

"...if I have now found favor in your sight, then receive my present from my hand, inasmuch as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me."

Here, a different type of battle was being fought, in which the two men tried to outdo each other in generosity. The battle of generosity was won by Jacob. It was good that he won, for he had wanted to make restitution to Esau. The gift could not make up fully for all the pain and loss suffered by Esau, but it was a clear token of genuine repentance.

A willingness to make restitution is expected when a Christian seeks reconciliation with someone he has offended. It is not only a sign of true repentance but it also gives one a clear conscience before God and men. A clear conscience is necessary for the filling of the Holy Spirit and usefulness in God's service. We are to imitate the apostle Paul just as he imitated the Lord (1 Cor. 11:1). When Paul was tried before the governor Felix, he declared (Acts 24:16), "...I

myself always strive to have a conscience without offence toward God and men."

## 5.2 Redemption For Jacob

### *An unusual occurrence*

An unusual, an even bizarre, event occurred at this time. That night, Jacob decided to send his family across the ford of Jabbok, which was a tributary of the river Jordan. He was going to bring them over again to continue the journey to face Esau the following day. It seemed that he sent them over for safety for the night. He had initiated reconciliation with Esau out of faith in God. However, that did not rule out the necessity of precaution on his part, in case there was a sudden attack against them in the night. The responsibility of the safety of his family was clearly heavy upon him. And he was genuinely fearful of his brother, not having met him after twenty years. In our account, we have fast-forwarded the reconciliation with his brother when, in reality, he had only made preparation for meeting his brother. The meeting was to be on the following day. He had another appointment to keep that night.

From the deliberate actions he took, it would seem that Jacob was making preparation to keep that appointment. When, or how, that appointment was made we are not told. It could be that the Man he was going to wrestle with that night had appeared to him earlier in the day, unbeknown to all others in his family. Genesis 32:21-24 says,

So the present went on over before him, but he himself lodged that night in the camp. And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day.

This meeting with the LORD was crucial to Jacob. He had followed the Lord's leading in the past twenty years. His return to the land of his father was at the prompting of the Lord, as seen in Genesis 31:3 & 13,

Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you. ...I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family."

Now, he was faced with a spiritual crisis more intense than when he met God at Bethel. He had to wrestle with this unknown Man who was obviously superior to himself in power. The prophet Hosea's commentary on this event was that Jacob met with the Angel of the Lord who is identified as God. This was the pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are told in Hosea 12:3-5,

He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and in his strength he struggled with God. Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed; he wept, and sought favor from Him. He found Him in Bethel and there He spoke to us—that is, the Lord God of hosts. The Lord is His memorable name.

The wrestling of Jacob with the Lord has been understood by generations of Christians as our need to wrestle with God in prayer. We wrestle with God whenever we are faced with trials in life as God's people. In particular, we are to seek the blessing of eternal life from God by wrestling with Him in prayer, until we know Him by faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, before we are able to interact with God as believers, we must first become believers. Jacob's wrestling with the Lord was his conversion experience.

*Jacob prevailed*

We are told in Genesis 32:24-26,

Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"

Here, it must be understood that Jacob did not prevail in the sense that he won the wrestling match. He was not stronger than

the Man he wrestled with. The Man merely touched the socket of his hip and Jacob's leg was dislocated. Clearly, the Man was far more powerful than Jacob, and could have easily killed Jacob. What Jacob wanted most from the Man was God's blessing. He had clung on in faith to God these many years. His perseverance in the faith was reflected in his wrestling match when he clung on to the Man even though the Man was more powerful than himself. Jacob was declaring in this wrestling match,

"I have cast my lot with God. I have faced trials of various kinds without. I have struggled with doubts and difficulties within me. I have come to this point in my life when I realise that I need my God. I need Him to bless me, without which everything in life will not be worth living for. Please God, do not forsake me!"

It is in that sense that Jacob prevailed. He did not win over the Man in the wrestling match. He prevailed in his struggle against trusting in himself, in his own effort, in desiring only his own wish. He now saw the futility of life without God. For that reason, he cried out, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"

The Man asked him what his name was, to which he answered "Jacob". Ah... how pathetic that name sounded at that instance! Usurper! Deceiver! That was what Jacob had been all those years. He had deceived others. He had deceived himself. But he could not deceive God. The Man now said to him (Gen. 32:28),

"Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."

"Israel" means *Prince with God* or *God's Fighter*. It does not mean *Prince of God*, meaning one of the chief warriors of God. Rather, it means one of the fighters for God, that is, one who serves God. Jacob was now a servant of God. He had always fought for himself, to gain from others. From now on, he would be one who serves God, and be a blessing to others.

Jacob had suspected who the Man was. He now asked, "Tell me Your name, I pray." The Man answered, and Jacob responded, as follows (Gen. 32:29-30),

And He said, "Why is it that you ask about My name?"  
And He blessed him there. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

His new name "Israel" was an indication of the change that had occurred in his life. He was now a new man, filled with God's Spirit. He was now a servant of the Lord. He was now ready to play his role as the bearer of the covenant blessing that was passed down to him from Abraham and from Isaac. This was also the name to be adopted by the nation that was to come from him. We are told in the next verse, "Just as he crossed over Penuel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip." (Penuel is the same as Peniel, meaning *Face of God*.) Jacob did not walk into the setting sun. Instead, he walked into the rising sun, signifying he was beginning a new phase of life. He might be walking with an ugly limp from now, but it would be a constant reminder to him from God: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9)."

Sadly, the nation that arose from Jacob was to miss the true significance of this crucial experience of their ancestor. They became superstitious and would not eat the muscle around the hip of the animals they slaughtered.

The Lord Jesus Christ told Nicodemus (John 3:5-8),

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

The Lord further said (John 3:15-16),

No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For



God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

While the new birth is the work of the Spirit of God, the seeker will persevere in seeking peace with God until he finds it through faith in Jesus Christ. The blessing that Jacob sought, and received, was the blessing of salvation in the Saviour promised in the covenant made with Abraham and Isaac.

## 5.3 Reconciliation Between Brothers

*Owe no one anything*

Jacob was full of fear and trembling when he encountered his brother the next day. Esau, on his part, was eager to meet his brother. His countenance showed that he was a changed man, in so far as his relationship with Jacob was concerned. God had softened the heart of Esau and transformed him from a hateful person to a forgiving person. In so far as his salvation was concerned, Esau remained unregenerate. We are told in Romans 9:10-16,

And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

The teaching of the Bible is clear: salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone. It is not by works. It is not by natural birth. It is God who has chosen the elect according to the good pleasure of His will (Eph. 1:3-14). Jacob was aware that Esau was an unregenerate man. While Esau accepted the gift from Jacob which he had at first turned down (Gen. 33:11), Jacob turned down the offer to travel

together, and also the loan of escorts from Esau. Jacob was firm on this. The battle for generosity was quite intense, as can be seen in Genesis 33:12-17,

Then Esau said, "Let us take our journey; let us go, and I will go before you." But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are weak, and the flocks and herds which are nursing are with me. And if the men should drive them hard one day, all the flock will die. Please let my lord go on ahead before his servant. I will lead on slowly at a pace which the livestock that go before me, and the children, are able to endure, until I come to my lord in Seir." And Esau said, "Now let me leave with you some of the people who are with me." But he said, "What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord." So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, built himself a house, and made booths for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

Why did Jacob insist on not accepting the generosity of his brother? The first reason is that Jacob was the one making restitution for wrong done to his brother. Wouldn't the restitution be nullified to some extent if he accepted the generosity of his brother? The second, and perhaps more important, reason was that Jacob was aware his brother was still unregenerate. Jacob was the one who inherited the covenant blessing from his father. There was no indication that Esau had faith in the God of his father. Jacob wouldn't want to risk another fracture to their relationship. This led to the third reason, namely that Jacob had a clear sense of purpose, of direction, and of destiny in his life ever since the experience of wrestling with the LORD the night before. Did he not limp into the rising sun? There was a sense of resolve in this man who, although limping, was now given over to the Lord to serve Him. He would not want to seek his own comfort at the expense of serving his God.

Jacob's action shows the truth of Romans 13:8, "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law."

### *Different destinies*

We note that Jacob expressed the wish to see his brother again in

Seir. That wish was never fulfilled. The two brothers were to meet again during the funeral of their father, Isaac (Gen. 35:29). We are told of what happened subsequently, in Genesis 36:6-8,

Then Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the persons of his household, his cattle and all his animals, and all his goods which he had gained in the land of Canaan, and went to a country away from the presence of his brother Jacob. For their possessions were too great for them to dwell together, and the land where they were strangers could not support them because of their livestock. So Esau dwelt in Mount Seir. Esau is Edom.

Each brother had his own destiny. One was prosperous in this world but lost sight of eternal and spiritual blessing. He moved away from the promised land. The other had the blessing of this world but would not be tied down to it. Instead, he had the faith of his father Isaac, and of his grandfather Abraham, of whom is said (Heb. 11:8-10),

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Jacob halted at Succoth, east of the river Jordan. From there he crossed the river and made his way to Shechem, where he stayed for a time. When Jacob was reconciled with his brother, he fulfilled the second great commandment, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." However, he would not allow that to eclipse the first commandment, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind (Matt. 22:37-40)."

It is to be noted that there is a teaching going around in Christian circles that when there is true reconciliation, things will be like before the breach of relationship. Jacob's life shows that that is not always possible. In fact, it is often practically impossible for, through

the experience, each party's true character would have been revealed and incompatibilities would have surfaced. Far better to part ways amicably than to force each other to live through potential tension and risk another fracture in relationship.

### 5.4 Conclusion

Restitution, redemption, reconciliation – these show how good it is to be at peace with God and men. A clear conscience before God and men, coupled to knowing the presence of God, and being filled with the Holy Spirit and His power – these are all inter-related. Such a life must begin at the foot of the cross of Calvary.

## Genesis 34:1-31

1 Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land. 2 And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her and lay with her, and violated her. 3 His soul was strongly attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young woman and spoke kindly to the young woman. 4 So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get me this young woman as a wife."

5 And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter. Now his sons were with his livestock in the field; so Jacob held his peace until they came. 6 Then Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. 7 And the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard it; and the men were grieved and very angry, because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, a thing which ought not to be done. 8 But Hamor spoke with them, saying, "The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him as a wife. 9 And make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters to yourselves. 10 So you shall dwell with us, and the land shall be before you. Dwell and trade in it, and acquire possessions for yourselves in it."

11 Then Shechem said to her father and her brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give. 12 Ask me ever so much dowry and gift, and I will give according to what you say to me; but give me the young woman as a wife." 13 But the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father, and spoke deceitfully, because he had defiled Dinah their sister. 14 And they said to them, "We cannot do this thing,

to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a reproach to us. 15 But on this condition we will consent to you: If you will become as we are, if every male of you is circumcised, 16 then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to us; and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. 17 But if you will not heed us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and be gone." 18 And their words pleased Hamor and Shechem, Hamor's son. 19 So the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in Jacob's daughter. He was more honorable than all the household of his father.

20 And Hamor and Shechem his son came to the gate of their city, and spoke with the men of their city, saying: 21 "These men are at peace with us. Therefore let them dwell in the land and trade in it. For indeed the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters to us as wives, and let us give them our daughters. 22 Only on this condition will the men consent to dwell with us, to be one people: if every male among us is circumcised as they are circumcised. 23 Will not their livestock, their property, and every animal of theirs be ours? Only let us consent to them, and they will dwell with us." 24 And all who went out of the gate of his city heeded Hamor and Shechem his son; every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

25 Now it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males. 26 And they killed Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem's house, and went out. 27 The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered

the city, because their sister had been defiled. 28 They took their sheep, their oxen, and their donkeys, what was in the city and what was in the field, 29 and all their wealth. All their little ones and their wives they took captive; and they plundered even all that was in the houses.

30 Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I am few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I." 31 But they said, "Should he treat our sister like a harlot?"





# Six

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## THE TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS OF FAITH

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There are trials, and there are triumphs, in the life of faith. These Jacob knew much of. We might say that the trials seem to feature more than the triumphs in his life. It is as though Scripture wants to warn us of trials because those are less expected and less desirable than the triumphs. Any attempt to minimise or hide this teaching is dishonesty and will cause harm to God's children. Equally, to hide the triumphs in the life of faith will discourage believers and propagate a distorted view of the life of faith. The triumphs, however, are clearly different from what the world expects. These are of a different nature and quality, and are appreciated only by those who have the life of Christ in them. Our purpose here is to show that faithfulness to God will be accompanied by sorrow and trials, as well as joy and triumphs.

### 6.1 The Trials Of Faith

#### *Before conversion*

The trials faced by Jacob before conversion were used by God to weaned him of trusting in self and to draw him to trust in the Lord instead. There were the trials arising from the squabbles between the two wives. There were the trials arising from working for his uncle Laban who turned out to be a ruthless deceiver, even toward his own nephew. In the providence of God these contributed to the

taming of the restless Jacob who learned patience, hope, and trust in the Lord.

No one enjoys being under trials, yet trials are a chief means used by God to mould our character. We are told in Romans 10:17, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." That trials are a certainty in the life of the believer is made clear in Romans 8:16-17,

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Most of the trials faced by Jacob came from family members. This we must expect as well, for the Lord Jesus says, in Matthew 10:34-39,

"Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."

### *The Dinah incident*

The Dinah incident caused no small grief to Jacob and his family. (Gen. 34:1-4). Dinah was a daughter born to Leah (Gen. 34:1-4). She appeared too outgoing a young lady for she was friendly with the young ladies of the land. On one outing to visit her friends, she was violated by Shechem, a prince of the land. Dinah's brothers plotted revenge by deceiving the Hivite men to be circumcised, with the pretext that the family of Jacob would be integrated with their people. On the third day, when all the Hivite men were in pain, Dinah's brothers – Simeon and Levi – descended upon the Hivites

with their swords, killing all the males, and plundering the city. (25-26). This brought real danger to the family, not perceived by the sons of Jacob in their anger. We are told in Genesis 34:30-31,

Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I am few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I." But they said, "Should he treat our sister like a harlot?"

God's guidance came at this trying time, for the family to move again (Gen. 35:1),

Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother."

These words must be compared with Genesis 33:18-20, which records the return of Jacob's family from Syria,

Then Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan Aram; and he pitched his tent before the city. And he bought the parcel of land, where he had pitched his tent, from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money. Then he erected an altar there and called it El Elohe Israel.

It would appear that Jacob had not sought God's will as to where he should settle when he returned from Syria. His concern was only to enter the land of Canaan, where he thought his family was safe. Canaan, however, was a vast land, still occupied by many pagan Canaanite tribes. God's will was for him to settle in Bethel, where he first met with God, and made his vow (Gen. 28:18-22).

Where we settle is a matter of importance. We must ensure that we are in God's will. Where God wants us to be will be where God wants to bless us. A primary consideration for most families is whether there is a good church in the place where they intend to settle. In relation to this, it must be noted that God guides His

children differently, and it is not for anyone to judge, or impose his opinion on, others. What needs to be borne in mind is the necessity of seeking God's will in prayer, in consultation with other believers, and to apply Scripture to one's own life.

### *Deaths and disappointment*

When Jacob arrived in Bethel, God appeared to him and blessed him. The covenant blessing was renewed with him, in the words of Genesis 35: 10-12,

"Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name." So He called his name Israel. Also God said to him: "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land."

Death brought grief to Jacob. As the family moved on from Bethel, Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel, gave birth to another son, Benjamin, but lost her life in the process. This must have been a big blow to Jacob, for he set up a pillar on her grave at that place of Ephrath, which was Bethlehem (Gen. 35:16-21). The family moved on and settled near to Bethlehem. We are told in Genesis 36:22 that "Israel dwelt in that land..."

An unhappy incident occurred. "Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard about it (Gen. 36:22)." What consternation this must have caused to the family! Reuben's shameful behaviour was to cost him his birthright. When Jacob passed on the covenant blessing to his sons, this was said of Reuben (Gen. 49:3),

"Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity and the excellency of power. Unstable as water, you shall not excel, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it—he went up to my couch."

Then came the death of Jacob's father, Isaac. He died at the ripe, old, age of one hundred and eighty years. Jacob at that time was

one hundred and twenty years old (Gen. 35:27-29 cf. 25:26). Jacob was to live on another twenty-seven years, dying at the age of one hundred and forty-seven years. The two brothers – Jacob and Esau – came together to bury their father.

Death has a way of sobering us up. We are reminded of Moses's Psalm 90, verse 10,

The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

We would not want to stop there but claim for ourselves the remainder of the verses, or at least verses 12 and 17,

So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. ...And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands for us; yes, establish the work of our hands.

#### *The loss of Joseph*

The next incident was the loss of Jacob's beloved son, Joseph. The favouritism of the earlier generation manifested itself in the present generation. We read in Genesis 37:3-4,

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

One day, while out of the home, the brothers colluded to get rid of Joseph. Reuben made a feeble attempt to save his brother. The sin of defiling his father's bed probably gave him no standing before his brothers to speak up more authoritatively. We read in Genesis 37:21-22,

But Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, "Let us not kill him." And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him"—that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father.

As events unfolded, Joseph was sold off to Ishmaelite merchants who were on the way to Egypt, without Reuben's knowledge. Joseph became a slave, and then ended up in prison under a false charge. God, however, was with him – protecting him and giving him favour among those he interacted with. While in prison, he interpreted the dreams of two men, showing that he was given unusual wisdom from above. Joseph rose to become the prime minister of Egypt, and was instrumental in the saving of lives when a severe famine struck that region.

Jacob, however, was ignorant of all this. He thought that his son had been killed by a wild animal.

### *Parting with Benjamin*

Another blow was to come to Jacob. He sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain – from none other than Joseph himself, but without their knowing it. When Joseph insisted that they brought their youngest brother in the next trip, Jacob was loath to part with him. He finally had to relent as the famine was severe, and Judah took it upon himself to guarantee the safe return of Benjamin. Rough-and-tough Simeon ended up a hostage in Egypt while waiting for the arrival of Benjamin. Finally, Joseph revealed his true identity to his brothers. What a round of joyous weeping there was! The brothers returned to fetch Jacob and the whole family to settle in Egypt.

Joseph's interpretation of the tumultuous events in his life and that of his family summarises well the purpose of God (Gen. 45:7-8),

"...God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt..."

Our focus is on Jacob, who suffered much in his pilgrimage on earth. Crushed like the 'pandan' (this may be replaced with 'mint') leaf to give forth its fragrance, Jacob had to bear up with trials and persevere in the faith. He reminds us of our Lord – the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isa. 53:3). Jacob's life exemplifies the principle taught by our Lord in John 12:24-26,

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.

We must die to self in order to be used by God mightily.

## 6.2 The Triumphs Of Faith

### *Joseph's triumph*

We are told in Genesis 37:1-2,

Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. This is the history of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers...

This brings us to the occasion when Joseph was about to be sold off by his brothers. The seventeen years with his father was sufficient for Joseph to catch Jacob's spirituality, favouritism notwithstanding.

Jacob came to Egypt with excitement, convinced at last that Joseph was alive. What a joyous reunion it was! In his old age, Jacob blessed Joseph with the double portion that Reuben lost as the firstborn. Joseph's two sons became two tribes in the nation of Israel. Knowingly, Jacob crossed his hands to place his right hand on the head of the younger son, Ephraim, and his left hand on the elder son, Manasseh, to bless them. He thus set Ephraim before Manasseh. In the history of the nation of Israel, the tribe of Ephraim (or Joseph) was to outshine the tribe of Manasseh. The tribe of Dan diminished in significance from the days of the Judges (Judg. 18:27-31) and is not mentioned in the list of the twelve representative tribes of God's people in Revelation 7:5-8.

In his dying moment, Jacob called his sons together to pass on the covenant blessing to them. The blessing to Joseph was more abundant than all his brothers' (Gen. 49:22-26). He was clearly blessed for the suffering he had gone through. In the blessing upon

Joseph, four names of God were used – the Mighty God of Jacob, the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel, and the Almighty.

In the process of revealing himself to his brothers, Joseph was providentially used by God to chastise his unruly brothers, which his father failed to do. His brothers were weaned of wickedness and repented of their hard-heartedness. Before Joseph revealed himself to them, Reuben said to his brothers (Gen. 42:22), "Did I not speak to you saying, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us." Joseph wept. Upon the death of Jacob, the brothers came to Joseph to confess their sin against him and bowed before him. Joseph said to them (Gen. 50:19-21),

"Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones."

Joseph's triumph was Jacob's triumph, for he received back Joseph who was as good as dead. Joseph was used by God to save many lives. In these respects, he foreshadowed the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, who died and rose again to save His people from their sin.

### *Revealing Christ*

It is worth taking a closer look at Jacob's dying prophecy concerning Judah (Gen. 49:8-12),

"Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's children shall bow down before you.

Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him?

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.

Binding his donkey to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washed his garments in wine, and his



clothes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk."

Judah was going to be the leading tribe, from which the Messiah would come. The Saviour was going to come from this tribe, for Shiloh was a cryptogram for the Messiah, the one also called the "Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5)". He who rode into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt would be washed in His own blood, shed for His people (Matt. 21:2; Luke 19:35). The "fruit of the vine" was going to be used by the Saviour to represent the blood of the covenant in the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:27-29). Abundance of spiritual blessing, arising from salvation in Him, would be the portion of His people (Eph. 3:14-19).

Was not this a triumph for Jacob – to reveal the coming of the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ?

### *God's presence*

Jacob was aware that God had been with him in his pilgrimage on earth. He said to Pharaoh, upon arrival in Egypt (Gen. 47:9-10),

"The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage."

Jacob died in peace, knowing that all was well with his son Joseph in charge. We are told in Genesis 49:28 & 33,

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father spoke to them. And he blessed them; he blessed each one according to his own blessing. ...And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

Jacob's death was described as being "gathered to his people". He died at the ripe age of one hundred and forty-seven years (Gen. 47:9, 28) – full of trials and triumphs.

As with Jacob, all faithful children of God are expected to have full assurance of salvation upon death. We are told in 1 Corinthians

3:14, "If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward." This must be seen together with Revelation 22:20, where the Lord says, "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work." The number of talents we have been given may differ, and the number of talents we produce may differ, but when the time comes we expect to hear the words of our Master saying to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25: 21, 23).

### 6.3 Conclusion

The life of faith is full of trials, which are used by God to mould our character, so that we become useful in His service. Thanks be to God, it is full of triumphs as well! The triumphs, however, are of the spiritual and eternal kinds. Jacob prevailed over his sinful self-centredness and self-trust and emerged trusting in the Lord. He persevered in faith despite heartaches and distress to see his son Joseph alive, who was as good as dead. He passed on the covenant blessing to his sons who would constitute the nation of Israel, declaring the coming of the Saviour. He died in peace at a ripe age, knowing that God had been with him, and that he was being gathered with the people of God in the better place.

Jacob's life shows us that "weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning (Psalm 30:5)." Are you often misunderstood and ostracised by your family because of your faith? Are you hated because of your stand for the truth? You are in good company, for our lives now partakes of the vertical dimension, and not merely of the horizontal.

## Genesis 48:1-22

1 Now it came to pass after these things that Joseph was told, "Indeed your father is sick"; and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. 2 And Jacob was told, "Look, your son Joseph is coming to you"; and Israel strengthened himself and sat up on the bed. 3 Then Jacob said to Joseph: "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, 4 and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.' 5 And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. 6 Your offspring whom you beget after them shall be yours; they will be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. 7 But as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died beside me in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)."

8 Then Israel saw Joseph's sons, and said, "Who are these?" 9 Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me in this place." And he said, "Please bring them to me, and I will bless them." 10 Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. Then Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them. 11 And Israel said to Joseph, "I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!" 12 So Joseph brought them from beside his knees, and he bowed down with his face to the earth. 13 And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand

toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near him. 14 Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn. 15 And he blessed Joseph, and said: "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, 16 the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."

17 Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. 18 And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head." 19 But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations." 20 So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will bless, saying, 'May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!' " And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh.

21 Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. 22 Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow."

# Seven

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## MAN PROPOSES, GOD DISPOSES

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The title of this chapter comes from a phrase that was used by Thomas a' Kempis in his book, "The Imitation of Christ", published in the 15th century. It is based on the biblical teaching of the sovereignty of God, which is expressed succinctly in Proverbs 19:21, "There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless the Lord's counsel—that will stand." The truth of God's sovereignty was seen in the life of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the Bible, the three names "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" are mentioned together as patriarchs of Israel, sharing the same God, and enjoying the same covenant blessing. That covenant blessing was passed on to the twelve sons of Jacob, from whom arose the nation of Israel. The twelve sons of Jacob were also referred to as "the patriarchs" by the Jews (Acts 7:9; Gen. 35:22-26).

We provide here an overview of Jacob's life. We want to note, in particular, God's sovereignty in Jacob's life, in the nation of Israel, and in the salvation to be found in Jesus Christ. We will see that "Man proposes, God disposes" is a truth that undergirds God's dealings with His people in these three areas. Jacob's life challenges us to examine our walk with God as a church, as individual Christians, and as those who need to be soundly converted.

### 7.1 Taming Jacob

#### *The process*

By nature, Jacob was a deceitful man who trusted in himself. What he could see were only the people and things of this world. The vertical dimension of God, heaven and spiritual realities was alien to him despite the fact that his father was a godly man. His father, Isaac, had awakened to spiritual realities since the occasion when he was taken by Abraham to be sacrificed to God. He had asked Abraham about the lamb for the burnt offering and learnt that God was *Jehovah Jireh – the LORD will provide* (Gen. 22:7-8, 14). When a wife was found for him, Isaac was found meditating in the fields (Gen. 24:62). The spiritual privileges Jacob had, however, did not automatically confer spiritual advantages upon himself. He had yet to be awakened spiritually. Jacob's name literally means "one who takes the heel", that is, a supplanter or a deceitful person. God was going to tame this restless soul, who was always trusting in his own wisdom and struggling for temporal gains.

Jacob's first personal encounter with God was at Bethel when he was given the dream of the ladder, or staircase, that connected earth to heaven. Angels were ascending and descending on that staircase, showing that communication between heaven and earth was taking place. That experience set Jacob on the path of seeking God, at a crucial point in his life when he was escaping from his brother's wrath. That was the first time he was leaving home, for such a long distance, and for what turned out to be twenty years' absence (Gen. 28:10). His prayer sounded infantile – for it was basically self-centred, and appeared to be bargaining with God (Gen. 28:20-22),

"If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

Jacob spent twenty years labouring for his uncle Laban – to win his two wives and to feed his growing family. He was deceived by his uncle many times – which was rounded to "ten times" (Gen.

31:7). Jacob had to use his ingenuity and hard work to build up his own property, all the while being weaned off trusting in himself and drawn to trust in God. As he set off with his family for home in Canaan, he was pursued by his uncle Laban while facing the prospect of meeting his brother Esau who had wanted to kill him in the past. Hemmed in from the front and the back, as it were, the time was ripe for his conversion.

#### *The outcome*

Jacob's conversion experience took place at Peniel when he wrestled with the Lord. He prevailed in persevering in the faith – overcoming trust in self, attachment to the world, and insistence on his own ways. At last, he was fully submitted to God and liberated from bondage to the horizontally-oriented view of life. It set him on a new stage of life (32:22-32). The prospect of facing Esau led to the exhaustion of all human wisdom and exertion in protecting himself and his family. He now wanted the Lord more than anything else. Life was not worth living without the Lord. "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" He emerged victorious – the victory being understood in the way we have described. The badge of honour was his permanent limb, as he walked into the rising sun, to begin a new phase of life (Gen. 32:31).

Jacob moved on to be a servant of God. The name "Israel" is translated *Prince with God*, not *Prince of God*. It must not be wrongly understood as "one highly regarded before God", but "one who fights for God", i.e. a servant of God. This is clear from the reaffirmation of his change of name upon his return from Padan Aram in Syria, to Bethel where he had his first personal encounter with God. God's words to him are recorded in Genesis 35:10-12,

"Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name." So He called his name Israel. Also God said to him: "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land."

It is to be noted that this was a reaffirmation of the covenant God had made with him at Bethel. He was *the* "Prince with God".

The well-known preacher of the 19th century, C. H. Spurgeon, was known to have said, "God has the man for the hour, and the hour for the man." Jacob was God's man for the hour. While the sons of Adam were caught up in the swirling events of the world, this man was quietly being used by God to advance His purpose. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened (Matt. 13:33)."

What is your role in the extension of the kingdom of God?

### 7.2 Passing On The Blessings

#### *Reuben*

Some points worthy of note in the blessings passed on to the twelve sons of Jacob are those that pertained to Reuben, Joseph, and Judah. Reuben lost his place as the firstborn because of his sin against his father. This stands as an indictment in the covenant blessing, which reflected his unstable character and his unworthiness to be the firstborn (Gen. 48:4),

"Unstable as water, you shall not excel, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it—He went up to my couch."

Like Esau, Reuben's life teaches us that one's standing before God is not dependent on birth or status in society. Leadership among God's people is determined by spiritual qualifications such as those delineated in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9. God has given talents to all His children for service, while opportunities to serve Him are aplenty. Not all, however, will serve Him faithfully in the little given to them, in order to progress to greater faithfulness. There are those who build on the foundation of Christ with gold, silver and precious stones, while there are those who build with wood, hay, and straw. The fire of God's judgment will test one's work, to reveal of what sort it is (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

#### *Joseph*

The blessings of the firstborn went to Joseph, who suffered much in his walk with God. The mention of his suffering cannot but make one to choke up (Gen. 49:23, 26),



"The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot at him and hated him. ...The blessings of your father... ...shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers."

But we are quickly lightened up by the strength in character of the man, who had God with him (Gen. 49:24),

"But his bow remained in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob (from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel)..."

Joseph's two sons were counted as two tribes of the nation of Israel, while the tribe of Dan is omitted in the list of the twelve tribes who represent the people of God, in Revelation 7:4-8. Although given their inheritance (Josh. 19:40-48), Dan abandoned it in the days of the Judges and migrated to the extreme north of Israel (Judg. 18:1-31). The final blessing of Jacob for Dan shows that the elect among them did not miss out on salvation (Gen. 49:18).

By a strict definition of a "type" in theology, it might be questioned whether Joseph typified the Lord Jesus Christ. However, the facts that he was as good as dead to Jacob and yet came to life, and that he was used by God to save many lives, point us clearly to the person and work of Christ. The blessing pronounced upon Joseph contained references to God by four names, namely, the Mighty God, the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel, and the Almighty (Gen. 49:24-25). The life of Joseph reminds us of the words of the apostle Peter concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, in Acts 3:13-15,

"...The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses..."

At the least, we must see that suffering is expected in the life of faith. This was taught by the Lord (Matt. 10:34-39), and also by the apostle Paul (Rom. 8:16-17).

### *Judah*

The tribe of Judah, referred to as a lion, was blessed with the promise that the Messiah (the Christ) would arise from them. The Messiah was referred to by the cryptogram (or word puzzle) "Shiloh" (Gen. 49:9, 10), corresponding to the title of the Lord, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah", in Revelation 5:5. The messianic implications of the blessing to Judah are too strong to be missed.

The relation between these three tribes is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 5:1-3,

Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel—he was indeed the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that the genealogy is not listed according to the birthright; yet Judah prevailed over his brothers, and from him came a ruler, although the birthright was Joseph's—the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel were Hanoah, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi.

### *The nation of Israel*

The covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was passed on to the twelve sons of Jacob, who were the progenitors of the nation of Israel. Together, these men were the patriarchs of the nation (Acts 7:9). The nation of Israel was the inheritor of the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses was a key figure during the formation of the nation. He was raised up by God to foreshadow the Saviour – in person and in work – who was to come from the nation. He foreshadowed the work of the Saviour in bringing the descendants of Jacob out of bondage in Egypt to enter the promised land. He foreshadowed the person of the Saviour by his role as mediator between God and His people. He prophesied the coming of a prophet greater than himself whom God's people must listen to (Deut. 18:18-19 cf. John 1:45; Acts 3:22-23). The Lord Jesus referred to Himself as the ladder, or staircase, of Jacob's dream when He said (John 1:51),

"Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

The Lord was claiming that He has come to reveal God, and His will, to men. He is also the way by which we will arrive safely to heaven. He says, in John 14:6 & 9,

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. ...He who has seen Me has seen the Father."

The history of the nation of Israel shows the unfolding of the covenant blessings pronounced by Jacob upon his sons. God's word cannot be broken.

## 7.3 Implications For Us Today

### *The covenant and the church*

The Abrahamic Covenant was passed to Isaac, then to Jacob, and then to the twelve sons of Jacob. The passing on of the covenant has implications for the church. The covenant encompassed the temporal and the spiritual aspects. The temporal aspect included the land of Canaan which typified the kingdom of God (Heb. 4:1-3), the many descendants which typified the members of Christ's church (Rom. 4:16, 18; 1 Pet. 2:9-10), the circumcision of the flesh which typified regeneration by the Holy Spirit (Col. 2:11-13), and the law which exposed sins and drove the people to seek peace with God through faith in the coming Saviour (Gal. 3:23-25). The true Jew is one who is born again of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 4:28-29). The true children of Abraham are those who trust in Christ for salvation (Gal. 3:29). The true Israel of God is made up of believers in Jesus Christ from all nations (Gal. 3:26-29; 6:15, 16).

The spiritual aspect of the covenant included the promise of a particular Seed of Abraham who would be the Saviour of the world (Gal 3:16). Abraham was saved, not because he kept the law of God, but because he believed in the Saviour who was promised in the covenant that was made with him (Rom. 4:3, 19-25; Gal. 3:16). The Abrahamic Covenant was but a link in the chain of revelation concerning the way of salvation provided by God for His people. The way of salvation is what is called the Covenant of Grace. The Covenant of Grace consists of two parts – the Old Covenant, which includes all the promises, revelations and covenants made with Abraham, Moses, and David in the Old Testament, and the New Covenant

which was inaugurated by the coming of Jesus Christ and sealed by His death and resurrection from the dead. Strictly speaking, the so-called Mosaic Covenant was not made with Moses, but with the nation of Israel, in which Moses was the mediator. The Mosaic Covenant consists of two stages, the revelation of the temporal aspect at Mount Sinai (Exod. 24), and the revelation of the spiritual aspect on the plains of Moab (Deut. 29-30). As with the Abrahamic Covenant, the temporal aspect consisted of types of New Testament realities, while the spiritual aspect was a revelation of the way of salvation, namely, the Covenant of Grace. The Covenant of Grace was revealed progressively in the Old Testament, and fulfilled in the New Testament.

The error of the Jews through the centuries lay in their focus on the temporal aspect of the Old Covenant, seeking to be saved by their effort in keeping the law, and taking pride in the possession of the temporal blessings of circumcision, of descent from Abraham, etc. Theirs was a religion that could be described as "having a form of godliness but denying its power (2 Tim. 3:5)." There are countless such religionists today – including those who call themselves Christians. The church has the onerous task of bringing the gospel to such. Thanks be to God, the power of salvation is in Himself, who uses the word preached to save! "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17)."

### *Commitment to God*

On another level, Jacob shows us the need to be genuinely committed to God and His cause on earth. Jacob grew up in a family that worshipped the true God. However, his field of vision was cast horizontally so that he was constantly thinking of gaining for himself at the expense of others. He was awakened to the reality of spiritual things when God revealed Himself to him at Bethel. After his encounter with the Lord at Peniel, he became a transformed man. He walked into the rising sun, showing that a new phase of life had come upon him. Although consigned to walk with a limp for the rest of his life, he had the Lord's blessing upon him. What was the limp when the Lord was with him? We are reminded of the words of the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9,

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most

gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Jacob was a true Prince with God, bearing up with trials within himself, in his family, and in the society he lived. There were the trials of making up with his brother Esau, facing the misbehaviour his firstborn Reuben, handling the incident of his daughter Dinah, and bearing the loss of his son Joseph for many years. He arrived back in Canaan to find his beloved mother Rebecca no more alive. His beloved wife Rachel died. His father Isaac died. He emigrated to Egypt with his big family in his old age, living there until he died. In his lifetime, he had fought the Amorite tribe and prevailed over them. This incident receives only a passing mention in Genesis 48:21-22, after he blessed Joseph's two sons,

Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow."

Not all the exploits of this servant of God are recorded in the Bible, but sufficient indications are given to show that he lived a difficult, albeit faithful, life. He died in peace, calmly drawing his feet into the bed and breathing his last. His death is described as being "gathered to his people" (Gen. 49:33). What a wonderful way to die! What blessed assurance he had of his salvation! His life exemplifies what the apostle Paul says in Romans 8:16-17,

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

#### *Wrestling with the Lord*

Jacob found peace only after wrestling with the Lord and submitting himself to Him. From the time of his spiritual awakening, it took Jacob twenty years to be weaned off self and attachment to the world, to trust in the Lord and to live for the kingdom of God. Our restless soul will find peace with God only when we turn our eyes to the Lord

Jesus Christ, who laid down His life on the cross as a ransom for His people. While on earth, the Lord said (Matt. 11:28-30),

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

The Lord promised His disciples that upon His departure to heaven, He would send the Holy Spirit who, among other things, would minister to them His peace (John 14:27),

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

How long does it take for an average person to be weaned of self to trust in Jesus Christ for salvation? The period of seeking for peace with God may take a long time or it may be short. God holds us responsible to seek Him until we find Him. The urgency of seeking salvation in Christ is obvious in view of the uncertainties of life. At the same time, God is sovereign in salvation and none can be certain of acceptance by Him unless he is truly born again of the Holy Spirit. How long has it been since you first became concerned for your soul? Or are you not concerned at all?

Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. (Isaiah 55: 6-7)

### 7.4 Conclusion

Jacob was a bearer of the Abrahamic Covenant. God sovereignly chose, guided and moulded him until he was ready to be used in His service. Put another way, Jacob was effectually called. God planted the seed of new life in him, awakened him to spiritual realities, convicted him of his spiritual needs, and brought him to repentance

and faith. Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit. The hand of God was at work in the transformation of Jacob. Jacob's experience shows that, regardless of how long it takes, genuine salvation is to be sought.

The Holy Spirit uses the word of God to convince, to convict, and to convert. The staircase in Jacob's dream at Bethel, the revelation of God to him when he was in Padan Aram, and his personal encounter with the Lord at Peniel, all show the central role of God's revelation in salvation. Christians have a responsibility to bring the word of God to hearers, to apply the word to seekers, and to preach the gospel of "Christ crucified" until sinners are converted.

Human responsibility is subsumed under divine sovereignty. Man proposes, God disposes. All glory be to the triune God!

*Other books by the same author:*

A BASIC CATECHISM OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

A GARDEN ENCLOSED: A Historical Study And Evaluation Of The Form Of Church Government Practised By The Particular Baptists In The 17th And 18th Centuries

AGAINST PARITY: A Response To The Parity View Of The Church Eldership A MULTIFACETED JEWEL: Studies on the Local Church

CESSATIONISM OR CONTINUATIONISM?: An Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14 and Related Passages

FLEE ALSO YOUTHFUL LUSTS: An Exposition of 2 Timothy 2:22

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF OUR FAITH: Studies on the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith

THE HIDDEN LIFE: A Call To Discipleship

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM: A Study On The Biblical Form Of Church Government

THE ROSE OF SHARON, THE LILY OF THE VALLEYS: An Exposition on the Song of Solomon

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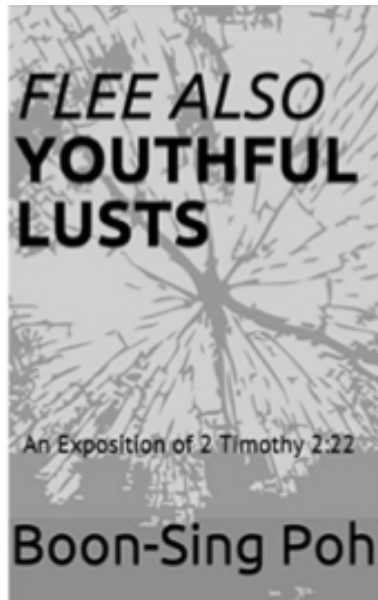
WHAT IS A REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH?

WORLD MISSIONS TODAY: A Theological, Exegetical, and Practical Perspective of Missions



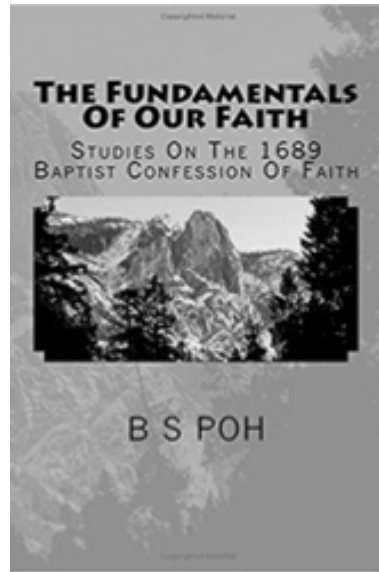
Other books that might be of interest to you:

### **FLEE ALSO YOUTHFUL LUSTS**



The primary purpose of this book is to help the believer handle youthful lusts. The text, namely 2 Timothy 2:22, is expounded so that youthful lusts are identified, dissected, and treated with the biblical remedy. Youthful lusts are not confined to youths, i.e. those who are young in age. They are found in older Christians as well. Older Christians, who have been in the faith for longer, are expected to handle youthful lusts better. However, they must be careful not to drop their guard as the serpent in them is always ready to rear its ugly head. It will be tragic for Christians of mature years to fall into youthful lusts and sin against the Lord. Furthermore, mature Christians should understand the struggles of the youths and be ready to guide them.

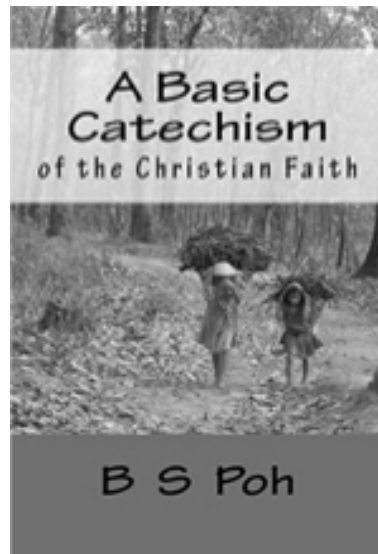
## THE FUNDAMENTALS OF OUR FAITH



A short course in systematic theology based on the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. One who has completed the course is expected to:

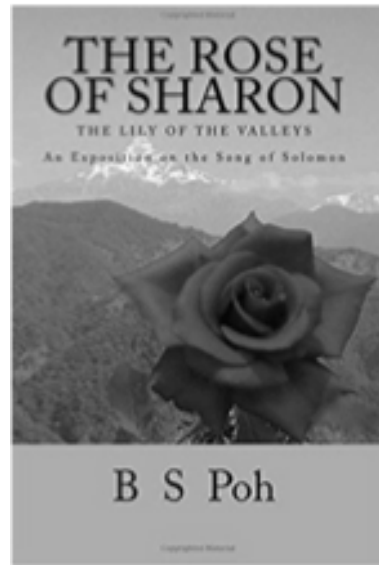
- (i) have a clear and firm grasp of the system of doctrine taught in the Bible;
- (ii) be aware of the errors that have appeared with regard to the doctrines;
- (iii) be able to interpret and teach the Bible with confidence as guided by the 1689 Confession;
- (iv) be better equipped to embark on a deeper study of Systematic Theology.

## A BASIC CATECHISM OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH



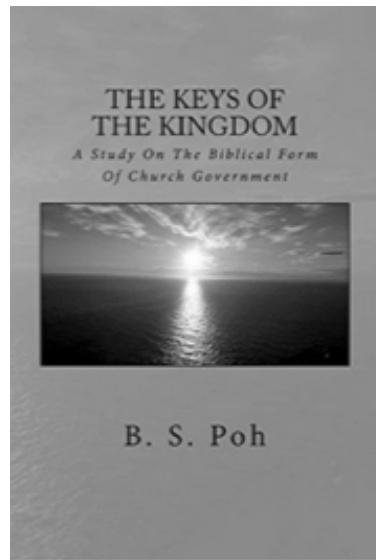
This is a basic catechism (or ABC) of the Christian faith from the Reformed Baptist perspective. The Reformed Baptists are known for their desire to uphold consistently the Reformation principles of "sola scriptura" (Scripture alone) and "semper reformanda" (always being reformed). This Catechism should be appreciated from this perspective, namely, the desire to submit ourselves to the authority of Scripture in doctrine and in practice. This Catechism, with commentary, is suitable for establishing the faith of believers and for convincing seekers of the Bible's system of doctrine.

## THE ROSE OF SHARON, THE LILY OF THE VALLEYS



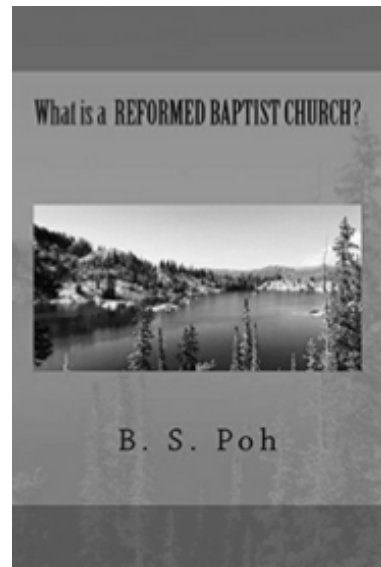
This exposition of the Song of Solomon treats the book as an allegory of Jesus Christ, who is "The Rose of Sharon, the Lily of the Valleys", in His interaction with His redeemed people. This book aims to edify the body of Christ, while serving to "jump start" the less experienced preachers who are seeking guidance for preaching from the otherwise "difficult" book of the Song of Solomon. The present book is written from a conservative, evangelical, and Reformed perspective.

## THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM



Independency, as practised by the Particular Baptists of the 17th century, is shown to be the biblical form of church government by considering eleven principles based on the Bible, the Baptist Confessions of Faith of 1644 and 1689, and the writings of John Owen - in descending order of importance. It is contrasted with three other forms of church government that have come down to us historically, viz. Episcopacy, Presbyterianism, and Congregationalism.

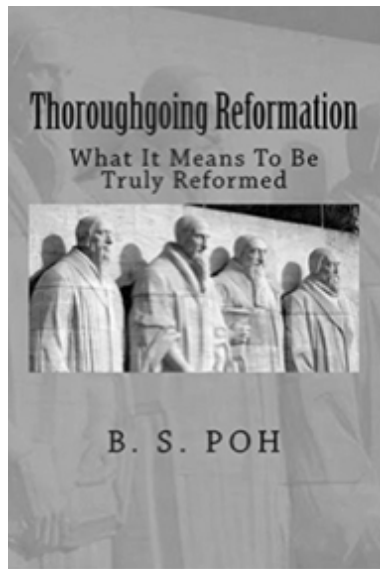
## WHAT IS A REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH?



In a time of great confusion about the Christian Faith what could be more timely, relevant and valuable than a survey of how we have come to cherish our beliefs described as Reformed Baptists. Of course we would maintain that we are Bible-believing Christians but that description is not enough. We have to come to terms with the history of the Christian Church and this my friend Poh Boon Sing has done in a most lucid and interesting way.

This work will surely commend itself not only to Reformed Baptists but to all Christians because Poh writes with respect and love towards others... Indeed this work is masterly for its compactness, "multum in parvo", a great deal packed into a few pages.

## THOROUGHGOING REFORMATION

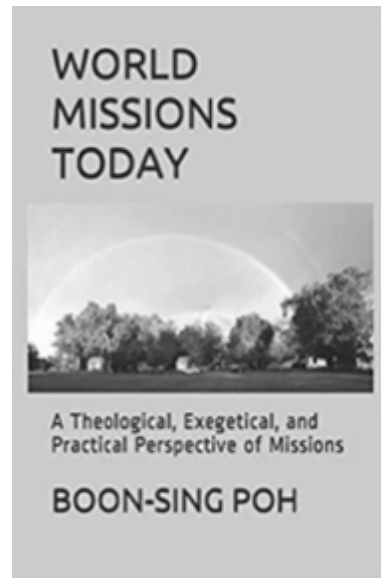


A short course in Reformed Symbolics or Dogma History covering the Apostles' Creed, the Five Principles of the Reformation, the Five Points of Calvinism, and Semper Reformanda.

This book is about engaging in thoroughgoing reformation in our churches and ministry. It is addressed primarily to those who call themselves Reformed, and secondarily to those who love the Lord and His cause on earth but have not seriously considered the Reformed faith as an option. In other words it is primarily a call for thoroughgoing reformation and secondarily a call to thoroughgoing reformation.

One who has completed the course is expected to: (i) have a clear overview of the progress of truth from the apostolic age to the present; (ii) value the Reformation heritage of truth; (iii) understand how thoroughgoing reformation may be practically accomplished; and (iv) be able to lead the church confidently in its relation to other churches and in its own mission.

## **WORLD MISSIONS TODAY**



Missions, which is the fulfilment of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, is part-and-parcel of the Christian faith. A theological, exegetical, and practical approach has been adopted to study this subject, with due cognisance given to the history of missions and the observations and proposals of experienced missionaries. This biblical and holistic understanding of missions will have profound effects upon the local church ministry and the approach to missions. The local church is not only to be missions-minded but to be involved in missions by engaging in a definite programme of local outreach and wider church planting. An awareness of global missions – ranging from tribal to urban outreach, homogeneous to cross-cultural evangelism, and past to present practice – will give one a sense of direction, purpose and destiny.





