

PART FORTY-TWO

THE STORY OF JACOB: HIS RETURN TO CANAAN

(Genesis 31:17—33:20)

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

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

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

GENESIS

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

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN

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

43 And Laban answered and said unto Jacob, The daughters are my daughters, and the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, and all that thou seest is mine: and what can I do this day unto these daughters, or unto their children whom they have borne? 44 And now come, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee. 45 And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. 46 And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones; and they took stones, and made a heap: and they did eat there by the heap. 47 And Laban called it Jegar-saba-dutha: but Jacob called it Galeed. 48 And Laban said, This heap is witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed: 49 and Mizpah, for he said, Jehovah watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another. 50 If thou shalt afflict my daughters, and if thou shalt take wives besides my daughters, no man is with us; see, God is witness betwixt me and thee. 51 And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold the pillar, which I have set betwixt me and thee. 52 This heap be witness, and the pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm. 53 The God of Abraham, and the God of Nabor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob sware by the Fear of his father Isaac. 54 And Jacob offered a sacrifice in the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mountain. 55 And early in the morning

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN 31:17-25

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN 31:17-25

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN 31:17-25

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

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN 31:17-25

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN 31:50-52

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN 31:50-55

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANNAN 31:50-55

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

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

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

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

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

GENESIS

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

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

JACOB. RETURN TO CANAAN

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

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

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

GENESIS

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN 32:1

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

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN 32:1, 2

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN 32:12-22

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

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

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN 32:22-32

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN 32:24-29

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

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

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN 32:26-29

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN 32:30-32

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN 33:12-17

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN 33:18-20

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

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

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN 33:18-20

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

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

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

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN 33:18-20

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

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

FOR MEDITATION AND SERMONIZING

Jacob's Wrestlings

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

GENESIS

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

* * * * *

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

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

(OTH, 103).

* * * * *

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

* * * * *

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN

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

GENESIS

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

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

* * * * *

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN

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

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

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

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

GENESIS

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

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

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

* * * * *

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN

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

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

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

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

GENESIS

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

* * * * *

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

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN

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

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

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

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

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

GENESIS

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

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

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN

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

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

* * * * *

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

GENESIS

"Esau was mollified, and when near enough to see the lowly prostrations of his trembling brother, forgot everything but that he was Jacob, the son of his mother, the companion of his childhood. He ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him; *and they wept*. All this is beautiful, natural, Oriental; and so is their subsequent discourse. . . . It was obviously the purpose of God to bring his chosen servant into these terrible trials, in order to work the deeper conviction of his former sin, and the more thorough repentance and reformation. And here it is that Jacob appears as a guide and model to all mankind. In his utmost distress and alarm, he holds fast his hope and trust in God, wrestles with Him in mighty supplication, and as a prince prevails: 'I will not let thee go except thou bless me. And he said, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed' (Gen. 32:24, 27, 28)" (Thomson, L.B, 371-372).

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON PART FORTY-TWO

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN

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

GENESIS

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN

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

GENESIS

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN

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

GENESIS

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

JACOB: RETURN TO CANAAN

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

GENESIS

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

For further research:

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