

Aunt Hattie's Bible Studies

by

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Chapter 5

Jacob

JACOB'S BIRTHRIGHT AND BLESSING

Twin boys?

Yes, twin boys.

For twenty years Isaac and Rebekah had been looking forward, in faith, to the fulfillment of God's promise for a son and now what a thrill to have the gift of two sons, whom they named Jacob and Esau.

The first thing Jacob did was to take hold of little Esau's heel as much as to say, "Here, I want to be first." Of course he did not know what he was doing but that trait went with him through life, and it was for that reason he was named Jacob, which means "supplanter," or one who pushes aside another and puts himself in his place.

The boys, though twins, were very different in nature. Jacob, a shepherd, was a sly schemer, even though he did understand the things of God. Esau was a great sportsman, who loved to hunt and with it all a happy-go-lucky fellow, having a good time and caring for little else than the pleasure of the present moment. He was born first and to him, naturally, would come the birthright and the blessing.

Perhaps we have better stop here to learn what was meant by these gifts. The birthright included three things,

- (1) the father's blessing and place as head of the family;
- (2) the honor of being in the direct line of the promised One, the Lord Jesus Christ; and
- (3) the privilege of being the family priest and offering the sacrifices.

God had spoken to Rebekah, their mother, before they were born and told her that the birthright, in this instance, would be given to the younger boy, Jacob. This was breaking a fixed custom but God has a perfect right to choose whomsoever He will to carry out His great plans.

Into this family, as the boys grew up, came a division. Isaac loved Esau the better because he

brought him deer meat, called venison, of which he was very fond. Rebekah especially loved Jacob and her heart was all wrapped up in him.

Rebekah, evidently, had told Jacob that God had said he was to receive the birthright and the blessing. He seemed to have an understanding of the value of these spiritual things but that was the only way he was above or better than Esau.

Time went on and nothing was done to secure for Jacob these longed-for gifts and he and his mother began to be uneasy about it.

One day Jacob made a nice kettle of bean soup and had it all cooked when Esau came in from a hunting trip and oh, boy, was he hungry? Did that bean soup smell good? I'll say it did. Esau said, "Jacob, give me some soup, I am about to faint, I am so hungry."

Jacob had been waiting for just such a chance and was ready for him. "I'll sell you some bean soup for your birthright," he said in a very tactful way. Esau never stopped to think what that meant but, as usual, thought only of the present and of how hungry he was.

He thought to himself that if he didn't get some food right away he would die and then what good would the birthright do him.

Before he gave him the soup Jacob made Esau swear that he would give him the birthright. How cheap to sell out for a bowl of soup, but maybe we do the same things in a different way. God has promised to us, through faith in Jesus Christ, an eternal birthright and along comes Satan and we sell out to him for the pleasures of this world and the satisfaction of the present moment.

Neither of these men did right. In fact Jacob bought what was really his own and Esau had nothing to sell. It was the same old story of not being willing to wait God's time.

A long time after this, when Isaac was old and blind, he sent for Esau and told him that if he would bring him a nice mess of deer meat he would give him the blessing. Of course he knew it belonged to Jacob, but Isaac wanted his favorite son to have it.

Rebekah was in the next room and heard it all. She said to herself, "Oh, he will give it to Esau, will he? I guess I had better take a hand in this." So she called Jacob and in the language of the present day, they framed old, blind Isaac, while Esau was gone to hunt for deer meat.

Rebekah told Jacob to hurry out and kill two kids of the goats and bring them to her. She said she would fix delicious meat for his father and Jacob could give it to him and get the blessing before Esau returned.

Jacob was afraid and said, "Now, mother, you know Esau has lots of hair on his hands and Dad will feel my hands and know it is I and not Esau and I'll get a cursing instead of a blessing." Rebekah said, "Never mind son, you do as I say and if necessary I'll take the cursing."

So Jacob did as his mother said and the kids were dressed and prepared. Then Rebekah got out

Esau's best suit of clothes and had Jacob put it on. This done, she took pieces of the goat skins with the hair and put them on the backs of Jacob's hands and on the back of his neck.

When the meat was ready to serve she gave it to Jacob and he carried it in to his father, Isaac, and said, "Father, here I am." Isaac said, "Who are you, my son?" Jacob answered, "I am Esau, your first born. I have done according as you bade me; arise, I pray you and eat of my deer meat that your soul may bless me."

Isaac thought that if it were Esau he had gotten back very quickly and Jacob realizing this, explained that the Lord had helped him. Wasn't he daring, to lie and then bring the Lord into it?

Old Isaac was blind but he likewise was suspicious. Things didn't ring true, so he said, "Come here, my son, let me see if you are really Esau." So Jacob went close to his father who felt of him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." And then he asked again, "Are you my very son, Esau?" Jacob again lied, saying, "I am."

Isaac ate the dinner they had prepared for him and then called his son Jacob, thinking he was Esau, and told him to kiss him and gave to him the wonderful blessing. **"And he came near, and kissed him: and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed: Therefore God give thee of the dew of Heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine"** (Genesis 27:27, 28).

"Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be Lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee" (verse 29).

Jacob had no sooner gotten away from his father's presence than Esau came in fresh from the hunt, bearing the meat for which his father had asked for, and saying, **"Let my father arise, and eat of his son's venison, that thy soul may bless me."**

Poor old Isaac was greatly excited and said, "Who are you?" Esau answered, "I am Esau, your son, your first born son Esau." Then Isaac felt ashamed that he had promised the blessing to Esau when God had said it should go to Jacob and so he stayed his word saying, "Yes, I have given him the blessing and he shall be blessed."

Esau was very angry and said, "Supplanter is a good name for Jacob for he has pushed me aside twice and stepped into my place. He took away my birthright and now he has stolen my blessing."

You see they were all wrong; they were trying both to help and to hinder God in carrying out His plans, rather than to wait for His direction. The only blessing Isaac had for Esau was that he should become rich and serve his brother. That didn't make him feel any better and his hatred toward Jacob grew more bitter every day until he said, "Never mind. Just wait until Dad is dead and then I'll kill him."

Someone carried this word to Rebekah and in great anxiety she called Jacob to tell him his life was in danger. Always thinking of the future, she suggested to Jacob that he go up to Haran and stay a few days with her relatives. She promised that she would send for him when Esau's wrath had passed away.

To Isaac she put it in a very different way. I fancy I can hear her sad tones as she said, "Isaac, these daughters of Heth, whom Esau has married, make me weary, and if Jacob should marry one of them my life would not be worth living. What shall I do about it?"

They talked the matter over and sent for Jacob. Isaac told him to go to Padanaram (Haran) to his mother's people and find a wife of the daughters of his Uncle Laban, and Isaac blessed Jacob and sent him away.

So their home was broken up and so far as we know Rebekah never saw her loved son again. I think she cried many times for the son she had sent away and all because of her own foolishness.

JACOB AT BETHEL

Jacob, a man used to the loving care of his mother and the quiet comforts of home, fled from the face of his brother Esau. On and on he went over miles of rough, mountainous paths, perhaps thinking every moment that Esau would overtake him. When the sun set and the chill of night was coming on he rolled some stones together for a pillow and lay down to rest. Weary of body he was soon asleep and lo, God came to talk to him in a wonderful dream. I think God had been wanting to talk to him for some time but had waited until he was alone and quiet.

Many times God wants to talk to us but we are not still long enough to listen to Him.

In this dream Jacob saw angels running up and down a ladder that reached from earth to Heaven, and behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "**I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.**"

Wasn't it gracious of the Lord to promise all of this when he was not worthy of any of it? Jacob was afraid, for he had a guilty conscience, and the presence of the Lord made his sin look blacker than ever. He got up early the next morning, piled up the stones he had used for a pillow, poured oil over them and called the name of the place Bethel.

Jacob, always a bargainer, now told the Lord that if He would be with him on his way, give him bread to eat and clothing to put on and lead him back home in peace, then the Lord would be his God. Foolish Jacob, the Lord had already told him He would do all this and much more, but Jacob did not see the greatness and power of God's promise, and thought only of his own personal needs and desires.

On he journeyed many days, until one day he came to a well in a field, where flocks of sheep were gathered. He thought he was near the end of his journey and so inquired of the shepherds who told him they were from Haran.

Jacob asked them if they knew Laban and they answered, “Yes, we do and there comes Rachel, his daughter, with her sheep.” Jacob wanted them to hurry and water their sheep and take them away but they said not until all the flocks had been brought together. I think Jacob wanted to be alone when he met Rachel.

By this time Rachel had come up with her flock and Jacob rolled away the stone and watered her sheep for her. Then he kissed Rachel and broke down and cried for joy that at last the long journey was over and he had found his Uncle Laban’s home.

Visitors were few and far between and especially members of their own family from a far away land. So Rachel hurried to tell her father, Laban, who on hearing the news, ran out to meet Jacob and to welcome him to his home.

I am sure they had a great time visiting. Laban would want to know all about his sister, Rebekah and family, and very likely she had sent loving messages to her brother.

JACOB AT HARAN

Jacob was an energetic, capable fellow and made himself very useful in Laban’s home life. Laban saw this and after Jacob had been there about a month, he said to him, “You are my relative, and must not work for me for nothing. What wages do you want?”

Jacob wasn’t long in finding an answer for ever since he had met Rachel that first evening by the well he had loved her with all his heart. Wages? He would give his very life for the one he loved, and so he told Laban he would serve him seven years for Rachel, his daughter. Laban agreed and the bargain was made.

The Bible says that Jacob’s love for Rachel was so great that the seven years seemed but a day. At the end of the time Jacob said, “Give me my wife.” Now Rachel had an older sister, Leah, who was not very good looking, and as it was the custom for the older sisters to marry first, Laban played a trick on Jacob. Brides wore veils over their faces in those days and the first thing Jacob knew he had married Leah instead of Rachel.

He was very angry at Laban and told him so, but Laban said never mind, that he could have Rachel too, if he would serve him seven more years. Because of his deep love for her he was willing to do anything, so the second agreement was made.

It was very unkind and hateful of Laban to do such a thing but we must remember Jacob had played about the same kind of game on his brother, Esau, and he was being paid back in his own coin.

Time went on and in the course of years Leah had four sons, Rueben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah.

Rachel had no children and she so much wanted a son. She had a maid by the name of Bilhah, whom she gave to Jacob for a wife and then her sons, Dan and Naphtali, were born they were regarded as Rachel's children. Then Leah gave her maid Zilpah, to Jacob and her two sons, Gad and Asher, were raised as Leah's. All of this was not according to God's plan, but it was the custom of the day.

Later, Leah had two more sons of her own, whom she named Issachar and Zebulun, and also a daughter, Dinah. Then God heard Rachel's prayer for a son of her very own, whom she called Joseph, and who was to become, years afterwards, a great blessing to his family.

Now, Jacob wanted to be free to do for himself, for he had served Laban a long time, but Laban was not willing to part with him for he had learned by experience that God had prospered him for Jacob's sake. He told Jacob he would pay him any wages that he would ask if he would only stay with him. But it wasn't money Jacob was looking for. He wanted Laban to give him what belonged to him and to have the privilege of making a home for his family and a place for his flocks.

You will remember that both Laban and Jacob were schemers of the deepest dye and the only thing to Jacob's credit above Laban's was his belief in the Word of God. God had chosen Jacob for a great place in His plans but it was only through God's grace and patience that he became in later years a worthy follower of God.

As was mentioned before, Laban asked Jacob to name the wages he wanted, and, as usual, he was ready with a plan. He said to Laban, "Do not give me anything, but I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll go through the herds of cattle and the flocks of sheep and goats and take out of them all the ring-streaked, speckled and spotted ones and put them in a place by themselves, and then I'll put all of the brown ones by themselves. My share will be all the little ring-streaked, speckled and spotted calves born from now on and all the plain brown ones will be yours."

Laban said that was a good plan and then took all the ring-streaked, speckled and spotted cattle and gave them to his sons and told them to take them away three days' journey. Laban thought he had played a good one on Jacob for he was left with only plain brown cattle and sheep, and it didn't look as though he would have very many speckled calves to call his own. It was a mean, selfish trick, but Jacob was as skilful as ever, and his scheming head was very busy.

He knew a great deal about what is known nowadays as "animal husbandry," that is, how to breed stock, and it wasn't very long until the finest little calves were being born ring-streaked, speckled and spotted, which he put in a flock alone and marked them for himself. All of the rest, most of them weak and poor, he put in a flock and kept for Laban.

When Laban's son came over to see the flocks they said, "Jacob has cheated Dad. Just look at his flocks and then look at ours. Furthermore Dad has given him all that ever he had." They told their father who went right down to see the flocks and Jacob saw that he was very angry. Things looked dark for both Jacob and Laban, but Laban returned home still angry.

Then God came to Jacob when he was out in the field and told him that if he returned to his own land, where his father lived, He would be with him. Jacob sent to the camp for Rachel and Leah to come to the field to talk things over with him. He said, “Your father is not pleased with me, but God has been with me. You well know how hard I have worked for your father and you also know how he has deceived me and changed my wages ten times. He has not hurt me physically, because God would not let him and all through these years God has cared for me and blessed me. God sent an angel to tell me that He has seen all that Laban has done to me, and also that He was the God of Bethel, where I anointed the pillar, and where I made a promise to Him. He said for me to arise and return unto the land of my father.”

Rachel and Leah, being women of good sense, saw Jacob’s point of view. They said their father had not treated them right and to him they were no more than strangers, so that whatever God wanted Jacob to do would be satisfactory to them.

JACOB AND THE MISPAH COVENANT

They began at once to arrange for the journey back to Canaan. The camels and asses were loaded. The flocks and herds, now of great number, were placed in charge of servants and all were soon on their way while Laban was off shearing sheep.

Three days later Laban returned and found out about the flight and also that someone had taken the household idols, for even though the Lord was named in this Syrian home, idols were also worshipped.

Gathering his men together they set out to catch up with Jacob and his family to get back, if possible, the gods. He was very angry, but God came to him in a dream and told him to be careful what he said to Jacob, and not to speak to him good or bad.

For seven days they hurried forward until they overtook Jacob where he had made a camp on Mount Gilead and there they also camped.

Needless to say Laban sought at once to speak with his son-in-law, saying, “Why have you run from me and carried away my daughters as though they were captives in battle? Why didn’t you tell me you wanted to go and I would have had a farewell party for you with lots of fun, songs and music on the harp and the tambourine? You didn’t give me a chance to kiss my children and grandchildren goodbye. You have acted foolishly. It was in my power to hurt you, only God told me not to speak to you good or evil. And now, Jacob, I know your heart longs for your father’s house and you want to go along on your journey, but why did you steal my gods?”

Jacob answered that if he had told him he was going to leave he would have kept his daughters by force. But, he added, that, so far as the gods were concerned (he did not know Rachel had taken them) whoever had them should die. So Laban rushed around from one tent to another hunting for them.

Finally he reached Rachel’s tent, who knowing he was coming, hurriedly put the idols into her camel’s saddle and sat on them, and although her father hunted all around he did not find them.

Then Jacob had his inning and told Laban all that had been burning in his heart these many years. He said, “Where have I sinned that you pursue me so hotly? You have searched all my stuff and what have you found? If you have found anything that belongs to you, set it out so that all can see it, and my men and your men can judge between us. Twenty years I have worked for you. I have taken care of your flocks and if an animal was injured or torn of beasts I took the loss myself. If a sheep was stolen by day or by night you charged it to me.

“Sometimes there was no rain and then again frosts killed the crops and there was little food for the stock. Many a night I have had no sleep because of anxiety. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your cattle and you have changed my wages ten times. Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac had been with me you wouldn’t have given me a thing. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands and warned you in a dream last night.”

Laban, unable to answer this biting charge said, “Come, let us make a covenant between us.” Therefore Jacob and his sons made a pillar of stones and gave it the name of Galeed or Mizpah, meaning a witness or a watch-tower and Laban said, “The Lord watch between us while we are absent one from the other.” That is to say, he asked the Lord to see that neither of them harmed the other behind his back. These words are often called the Mizpah benediction and one almost has to file when their origin is thought of, for it means, “The Lord watch you, because I sure don’t trust you!”

Laban, to make the covenant more binding, continued by saying, “Behold, this heap of stones, this pillar which is cast up between us, will be for a witness, that I’ll not step over to your side, nor are you to step over to my side. The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father judge between us.” And Jacob swore to the covenant in the name of his father Isaac, and offered sacrifices upon the mount, and they ate bread and stayed out under the stars of Heaven all night. Early in the morning Laban kissed his daughters and grandchildren and returned home.

Thus ended the partnership of two men, Jacob and Laban, who had lived together for twenty years and all the time each had a very selfish desire to deceive the other. Not a very happy way to live, was it? Such lives usually separate as these did, with each one doubting the other even though they were separated one from the other.

JACOB MEETS ESAU

The present difficulties settled, Jacob at last faced toward home and as he journeyed a host of angels met him. Some think God sent them to welcome him back to his own land and to guide and protect him.

One would think that now surely Jacob must be very happy for he was going home but instead of that he was very wretched, for his thoughts were all taken up with a bad conscience, which is always bringing up things we try to forget. He wondered if Esau had gotten over his angry spell. I think, too, he was homesick to see mother and dad. His mother had said he should stay up at

Haran only a few days and then come back but he had been gone many years.

Jacob thought the whole situation over and over again in his mind. He decided to send a company of messengers ahead to the country of Edom where Esau lived and find out if possible, his brother's attitude toward him.

When the delegation started out Jacob instructed them to say to Esau, "Your servant, Jacob, says to tell you that he has been all these years with Laban, and that he has oxen, asses, flocks, menservants and women servants, and he is returning and wants to know if you will receive him graciously."

A few days later they returned to Jacob with the news that they found Esau and that he was coming to meet him with a company of four hundred men. Jacob was terribly frightened. Four hundred men coming to meet him and Esau leading. What should he do?

He decided to divide the people, the flocks, the herds and the camels into two bands. Then if Esau smote the first company, perhaps the other could escape. Jacob prayed, "**O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. 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. 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.**"

When he prayed it sounded as though he depended upon God but he did just what lots of people do today, when he got through praying he turned to his own planning in his own way.

He decided to arrange a present for Esau and so he chose two hundred and twenty goats, two hundred and twenty sheep, thirty milk-camels with their colts, fifty cattle and thirty asses, each kind in a drove by themselves, gave them into the hands of servants and sent them on ahead, telling them that when they met Esau and he asked whose these were, they should answer, "**They be thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my Lord Esau: and, behold, also he is behind us. And so commanded he the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him. And say ye moreover, 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; peradventure he will accept of me.**"

So they went to meet Esau, but Jacob and his family stayed in the camp. In the night, for Jacob could not sleep, he got up, took Rachel and Leah and their maidservants and his eleven sons and sent them over to the other side of the brook Jabbok that they might be better protected.

"And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day."

Let us think a little bit about this great, commanding, yet fearful and uneasy Jacob. He was going back home in obedience to the call of God, for Jacob always had believed God's Word and had respect for it whether or not he obeyed it. Yet, even though under the guidance of God, he had too much confidence in his own strength and in his own schemes and God had to bring him to see that he was nothing in himself and that God must be the controlling power in his life.

So God sent an angel in the form of a man, to wrestle with Jacob. Yes, the angel could have overcome him at once but he wanted Jacob to realize that he was against a power greater than his own. All night the wrestling match went on, and as day began to dawn, the angel touched Jacob's thigh and put it out of joint. Then, his strength gone, Jacob fought harder.

The angel said, "**Let me go,**" but Jacob realizing he would be left a helpless cripple shouted, "**I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.**"

The angel said, "**What is thy name?**" He answered "**Jacob.**" And the angel 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.**" Jacob asked the angel what his name was but he wouldn't tell him although he did bless him and then went his way.

Jacob, supplanter; Israel, prince with God. Who wouldn't rather be a prince than a supplanter? Doesn't it seem foolish to us as we read this story to think of how all through the years of sorrow, worry and trouble he might have been a prince of God living a satisfied, wholesome, God-controlled life? Is your name Jacob or Israel?

Jacob called the place Peniel. See it on the map? Peniel means the face of God and Jacob said there he had seen God face to face and lived. When he walked over to join the family he limped and I think ever after that when anyone asked him why he was lame that he said it was the sign of his spiritual victory.

Strange to say that although he had been victorious it was not all at once that Jacob walked as Israel, for now he lifted up his eyes and saw Esau with his great company of horsemen coming over the top of the distant hills, and Jacob returned to his schemes. He divided the family into three groups with Rachel and Joseph last.

Then he, himself, went ahead and we find him bowing down seven times as he approaches Esau and oh, joy! Esau forgot all of his ill-feelings when he saw his brother, Jacob, and ran to meet him and kissed him in true oriental style, and they were both so happy they cried.

When they had found their voices out of all this excitement, Esau said, "**Who are those with thee?**" And then Jacob had all of his family come up and he introduced them to his brother.

Esau asked Jacob what the idea was of all those droves of stock he met out on the highway as he came up. Jacob said, "That is a present for you, to fix up the past so that you will be gracious to me." Esau said he had a great plenty and that Jacob should keep it for himself, but Jacob made him take it.

JACOB AGAIN IN CANAAN

After Jacob and Esau had visited for a while Jacob began to ask about the roads and the best way to get into Canaan. Esau wanted him to follow him to Seir but Jacob stayed a while at Succoth, on the east of the Jordan, and then after a time he passed over Jordan and went to the city of Shechem and bought a piece of land and set up his tent upon it. Jacob should have gone right to Bethel as God had told him to do.

His daughter Dinah thought she would go and call upon the girls of Shechem and the first thing she knew the prince of the Hivites had fallen in love with her. Before the affair was ended Dinah's brothers had murdered all the men of Shechem, rescued their sister and spoiled the city, that is, took all of its wealth.

When Jacob found out about it he was very sorry and told his sons that they would bring trouble on the whole family by doing such terrible things. Jacob was partly to blame, for, had he gone to Bethel as God had told him to, it wouldn't have happened.

Then God came with a definite command to him. He said, **“Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.”**

It seems that back of all this there was a reason why Jacob was not making any headway and was having so much trouble. The Bible says that after God called him to go up to Bethel he gathered his household together and told them there would have to be a house-cleaning of all sorts of things of which God did not approve. You remember Rachel had the household gods of her father. And perhaps, when they took all of the wealth of the city of Shechem there were idols in this gain. Also, they were wearing little idols for earrings. All of these things had to be given up, for in Jacob's family only the true God was to be worshipped.

When these idols were gathered together Jacob took them out and buried them under an oak tree. With these troublesome things left behind the family of Jacob journeyed to Bethel. I am sure he thought of the night he spent there so lonely and sad and again of the beautiful dream and God's promises.

At Bethel, Jacob built an altar and worshipped God with sacrifices. When he was there before he called the place Bethel, which means “house of God.” Now he called it El-Bethel, or “the God of the house of God.” You see by this time it was not so much the place but the God of the place that Jacob was worshipping. God was pleased with Jacob's sacrifice and came down to renew His covenant with him. He told him again that his name was no more Jacob but Israel and from then on he walked more like a prince than a supplanter.

Jacob then journeyed to Hebron to visit his father, Isaac. When they were not far from Bethlehem God gave to Rachel another son whom she named Benoni or “son of sorrow,” for she realized she was dying and she knew her death would be a great grief to Jacob who loved her dearly. After she died Jacob named the baby Benjamin, or “son of my right hand,” for he said the child would be a strength and comfort to him.

Jacob buried Rachel in the place where she died, and erected a pillar over her grave. That very place is still preserved, although it is marked by a rather modern tomb.

I am sure Jacob was glad to see his father, Isaac, when he reached Hebron, but I know he also missed his mother, especially at this time when he was mourning for Rachel. No story of the Bible records a more beautiful, tender and abiding love than that of Jacob for Rachel.

It wasn't long until Isaac died at the age of one hundred and eighty years. Esau came to the funeral and he and Jacob buried their father in the cave of Machpelah beside Abraham and Sarah.

In the story of Joseph I'll tell you more of the later years of Jacob's life at Hebron for they are very closely linked together.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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