**(From Bernice Shotwell, “Getting Acquainted with the Bible.”)**

Jacob: a patriarch, was the second son of Isaac and Rebekah and the grandson of Abraham. He fathered the twelve tribes of Israel and was connected with the period which marked

the beginning of the history of the Children of Israel.

Not only were the righteousness and great faith of his grandfather part of Jacob’s human heritage, but so also was the righteousness of his father Isaac, whose life shows an unfailing reliance on God and an obedience to the Abrahamic covenant renewed with him (Gen. 26:2–5). Isaac waited in faith for the coming of a son as his wife Rebekah remained barren for twenty years; but he entreated the Lord for her, and she conceived and bore twins, Esau the elder and Jacob the younger.

Before the birth of these children Rebekah had been told: “Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people . . . and the elder shall serve the younger.” This prophecy foreshadowed the rivalry between Esau and Jacob as brothers, and between their descendants as nations, Edom and Israel (Num. 20:20,21; II Sam. 8:14). Esau was “a cunning hunter, a man of the field.” Jacob was “a plain [quiet] man, dwelling in tents,” leading the life of a herdsman. “Isaac loved Esau . . . but Rebekah loved Jacob.”

The character of this patriarch is clearly portrayed, both his weaknesses and his strength, showing the inner conflict between the base desires of his nature and the inherent good. He shrewdly bought the birthright of the first-born from Esau, taking advantage of his brother’s momentary hunger. According to prophecy the birthright had been promised to Jacob, and would have fallen to him in a divinely natural way; but in his strong desire to possess it he went even further and employed fraudulent measures to deceive his aging father and obtain the paternal blessing which would confirm the birthright. Although Esau also received a blessing, he vowed to kill his brother.

Later Isaac confirmed the blessing to Jacob and charged him to take a wife from the daughters of Laban, his mother’s brother in Padan-aram. (Esau, at forty, had married two Hittite wives, “which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah.”) Thus Jacob was sent beyond the reach of Esau’s hatred.

Journeying to Padan-aram Jacob stopped at Beth-el where he lay down to sleep. His rest was troubled, fleeing as he was from his own thoughts and from the wrath of Esau. But he was given new hope. In a vision he beheld a ladder “set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.” He learned that he was not alone; that God was with him. Here at Beth-el God renewed the covenant he had made with Abraham and with Isaac.

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Finally, at God’s command, Jacob departed with his family, fleeing secretly by night. Laban pursued, but God forbade him to harm Jacob and the two made a covenant of friendship.

“Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.” Heartened, he sent messengers of reconciliation to Esau. But, still fearful of his brother’s revenge, he spent a long night in prayer, and “there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.” In this spiritual experience his self-will yielded, his nature was changed and the true birthright became his through grace. 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” (Gen. 32:28). Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, “for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”

“As the name was to the Hebrews the symbol or expression of the nature, the change of name is significant of the moral change in the patriarch himself; he is no longer Jacob the Supplanter, the Crafty one, the Overreacher, but Israel the Perseverer with God, who is worthy also to prevail”: cp. Hos. 12:4.9

On the morrow the brothers were reconciled. Having seen God “face to face,” he could now say to Esau, “I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me.”