

All the saints who submitted to the wickedness about them, trusting that they would be avenged ultimately, will be found to have placed their trust well. The mighty warrior of their cause is "Faithful and True".

The faithful witness

This title is found in Revelation 1:5. The word 'witness' is the Greek *martus*, from which our English word 'martyr' comes. We are, then, speaking of a man who was so completely faithful to his Father's commission and to upholding truth that he died for the testimony that he bore. How many of us have been called upon to do that? How many of us would answer such a call if it were made? It has been! We are to be faithful to Christ in every circumstance; faithful unto death if necessary.

The faithful and true witness

This is found in Revelation 3:14. This has all the elements of the above titles put together. How marvellously did Jesus show his Father's char-

acter! He would sooner die than be untrue or show God's trust in him to be unfounded. We may safely trust in him who is faithful and true even to death.

The Amen

This title is also found in Revelation 3:14. The word has been transliterated from Hebrew into Greek and then into English. The Hebrew *amam* means to believe or to be faithful, and is a very similar word to that for 'amen', which is the word *aman*. By degrees it came to mean that which was sure and trustworthy. When said at the beginning of a speech it indicates the truth of what is to follow. When said at the end it represents the firm hope that what has been said will occur. It is an expression of absolute trust or confidence based on the reliability of God and Christ. It is used by Christ in Revelation 22:20: "Surely I come quickly. Amen". What the title is telling us is that Jesus Christ is God's guarantee of the fulfilment of His purpose. This is the idea behind the word "assurance" in Acts 17:31.

Exposition

The faithful of old— studied by the young

Jacob: the tent-dweller

William Southgate

A DIVINE SUMMATION of Jacob's character occurs very early in the record of Jacob's life. We read in Genesis, "And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents" (25:27). So the Divine opinion on Jacob was that he was a "plain" or a 'perfect' man. We read in the Psalms, "Mark the *perfect*¹ man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace" (37:37), and so it is important that we consider this perfect man Jacob, to examine what lessons we can take from his life to apply to our own, as we seek to emulate his example.

The importance of separation

One of the most striking things about Jacob is that from a very early age he understood the

separation between the things of God and the things of the world. The contrast between Jacob and Esau is immediate and obvious. Esau was "a cunning hunter". The only other hunter we read of in the Bible is Nimrod in Genesis 10, a man who hunted "before the LORD" (v. 9), or 'in the face of the LORD', as that phrase can be rendered; and so there is an association between hunting and defiance of the Almighty. We read further in Genesis that "the beginning of his [Nimrod's] kingdom was Babel" (v. 10)—Babylon, the very centre of humanist and apostate thought.

In addition to being "a cunning hunter", Esau was also "a man of the field". Consider the follow-

1. The same Hebrew word *tam* is translated "plain" in Genesis 25:27.

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ing words from Isaiah 40:6-8: “The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the *field*: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever”. From these verses we can see that the field represents the flesh, the transitory, the world—that which is caused to fade by the spirit of God. This is emphasised by Jesus when he uses the field to represent the world in the parable of the wheat and the tares (see Mt. 13:38).

We can conclude, therefore, that Esau was a man very much concerned with the natural. His chosen vocation linked him with human pride; his love of the field demonstrates his love of the natural and the worldly. Contrast this with Jacob, “a plain man, dwelling in tents” (Gen. 25:27). “Dwelling in tents” is a phrase that is quoted in Hebrews 11:9: “By faith [Abraham] sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, *dwelling in tabernacles* with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise”. It is clear from this passage not just that Jacob dwelt in tents (perhaps symbolic of his attitude towards

the world as opposed to Esau’s), but that he dwelt in tents with Abraham and Isaac. Not only was he shunning the world; he was spending time with Abraham and Isaac, learning of the things concerning the covenant, spending his time on spiritual things. We read of Abraham, “For I know him [Abraham], that *he will command his children and his household after him*, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him” (Gen. 18:19).

Abraham was a man who instilled the justice and the judgement of God into his offspring. Jacob, unlike Esau, dwelt in the tent with Abraham for a period of fifteen years learning “the way of the LORD”. This is why he was described as “a plain man”(or ‘a perfect man’), because he chose not to enjoy the world but to dwell in tents and to learn the way of the Lord from Abraham.

Learning “the way of the LORD”

There are powerful lessons from the decisions these brothers made and the way they chose to spend their time. Jacob’s choice was to separate himself from the things of the world, and we must

do the same. Our separation should pervade every aspect of our lives; we should figuratively 'dwell in tents'; we should "come out from among them, and be . . . separate" (2 Cor. 6:17) in the things we do, the places we go to, the way we spend our time, what we spend our money on, what we watch, and the music we listen to. These should all be marks of our separation.

There is, however, more to separation than not doing this or that, or not going there. Jacob did not just separate himself from worldly things to do nothing; instead he learnt "the way of the LORD" from Abraham and Isaac. Again, this is something we must strive to emulate. Just as Jacob learnt from his elders, we too must make the effort to learn from ours. We should speak to those more experienced brethren and sisters at our ecclesias; we must absorb their Scriptural knowledge and experience of ecclesial life, and learn "the way of the LORD" from them.

The knowledge that Jacob obtained from Abraham, and from his father Isaac, was to be of vital importance. Following his deceiving of Isaac to obtain the blessing, and the subsequent wrath and proposed vengeance of Esau, Jacob left his home at Beer-sheba and came to "a certain place" (Gen. 28:11). The record states that Jacob stayed there all night because "the sun was set". This is a very significant detail. It started a period in Jacob's life which, I suggest, ends in 32:31, where we read, "as he [Jacob] passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him".

What is the significance of this, and what can we learn from it? The reference to the sun's rising can be linked to Malachi 4:1,2: "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall".

This passage likens the rising of the sun to the return of Christ. In type, therefore, the end of this period in Jacob's life, the rising of the sun, represents for us the return of Christ. The time before this, the night, must represent the time before Christ's return. This is confirmed by what we read of the night elsewhere in Scripture, notably in Romans 13:11,12: "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. *The night is far spent, the day*



God confirmed the promises to Jacob while he slept. We are in a similar position to Jacob: ". . . whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises . . ."

is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light".

The "day" speaks of the coming Kingdom, and the "night" of the present time, the time we have now to prepare for that Kingdom. We will come back to this point later, but first we want to examine some aspects of this period in relation to Jacob, and relate them to our own lives.

We left Jacob at that "certain place" in Genesis 28:11. While he was there, God confirmed the promises to Jacob when he slept: "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" (v. 13).

We are in a similar position to Jacob. Consider the words of 2 Peter 1:4: ". . . whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises:

that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust”.

On awaking, Jacob erected a pillar, of which he said, “this stone, which I have set for a *pillar*, shall be *God’s house*” (Gen. 28:22). He named the place Beth-el, which means ‘the house of God’. In Timothy Paul writes of “*the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*” (1 Tim. 3:15). Here we see that the house of God (Beth-el) in our lives is the ecclesia.

Pilgrims and sojourners

There is something else that Jacob did at this stage. He made a vow: “If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God’s house: and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee” (Gen. 28:20-22).

Jacob asked for bread, raiment, to be kept in “this way”, and to come back to his father’s house in peace. This clearly has a literal aspect, as we read in 1 Timothy 6:8: “And having food and raiment let us be therewith content”. We should not desire any more than the necessities of life. There is, however, a spiritual element to Jacob’s vow that points us to the redemptive work of Jesus. Jesus said, “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (Jno. 6:35). Just as Jacob desired raiment to “put on”, so, similarly, “as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have *put on* Christ . . . And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:27,29). We can see that the bread and the raiment symbolise the work of Christ required in order for us to “come again to [our F]ather’s house in peace”.

And so Jacob had begun a journey. He had begun this period, the night, and it would last many years, until, as we read in Genesis 32, “the sun rose upon him”. One of the most positive exhortations we can draw from this period of Jacob’s life was his attitude to Laban, who was his master. He says to him in 31:38-40, “This twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. 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. Thus I was; in

the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes”.

Ephesians 6:5-7 says, “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men”. In Jacob we see the outworking of this command, and it is a lesson that we must take into our own lives. Whether our “masters” be teachers, tutors, lecturers or employers, we must be subject to them and perform God’s will by so doing.

The night of our pilgrimage

In conclusion we will look at a passage in Psalm 119 to do with the night, which allows us to draw some comparisons with Jacob to extract lessons for ourselves:

“Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of *my pilgrimage*. I have remembered Thy name, O LORD, *in the night*, and have kept Thy law” (vv. 54,55).

The night here is equivalent to a pilgrimage. The word for “pilgrimage” is the same word that Jacob used when describing his life to Pharaoh: “The days of the years of my *pilgrimage* are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been . . .” (Gen. 47:9).

Jacob regarded his life as a pilgrimage, as we should. “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and *pilgrims*, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:11,12).

We are in this world as strangers and pilgrims and should not be concerned with this life and this world. We, as we read in Hebrews 13:14, should have here “no continuing city, but . . . seek one to come”—one that we read of in Revelation 21:23-25: “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: *for there shall be no night there*”.

Let us look for that Kingdom while it is night; let us dwell in the house of God, keeping His law, learning of His promises, always taking

heed to Paul's words to the Thessalonians and to the Romans:

"But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the

day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness" (1 Thess. 5:4,5);

"The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light" (Rom. 13:12).

Exposition

Moses: earth's meekest man

33. The oracles

John Mitchell

The rapid success of the Israelites alarmed the Moabites, who hired Balaam to curse Israel. However, God's purpose to bless Israel was not thwarted, but declared in detail by the prophet, despite his intense desire to please the king of Moab.

WITH THE TOTAL defeat of the Amorites east of Jordan, the crossing of the children of Israel into the Promised Land might have proceeded unhindered had it not been for the unexpected animosity of Moab expressed in a peculiar form. Hitherto, Balak king of the Moabites had been neutral towards Israel, and no doubt happy to see the destruction of the Amorites, who had stolen some of his northern territory. But when he saw the extent of the Israelite camp opposite Jericho he was filled with dread of them, and consulted with his allies, the Midianites. Through his elders Balak said to their elders, "This horde is going to lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field".* Militarily the Moabites could not prevail, so Balak devised another approach, that of divination, by spiritual duplicity.

He had heard of a prophet in Mesopotamia who was accredited to Yahweh, the God of Israel, and who, for a fee, would engage in effective divination against an enemy—or so Balak believed. So he sent a deputation of princes to Balaam the prophet, saying, "A people has come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the land and have settled next to me. Now come and put a curse on these people, because they are too powerful for me. Perhaps then I will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the country. For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed".

The deputation came to Balaam with the appropriate fee, and he told them to stay the night while he sought an answer from the Lord—which he duly received. "Do not go with them", said Yahweh. "You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed".

A more tempting offer

Accordingly, Balaam sent the princes away, saying, "Go back to your own country, for the LORD has refused to let me go with you". Sensing from his reply that it was Yahweh rather than Balaam who was being negative, Balak sent a more distinguished deputation to Balaam, saying, "Do not let anything keep you from coming to me, because I will reward you handsomely and do whatever you say. Come and put a curse on these people for me".

But Balaam answered them self-righteously, "Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything great or small to go beyond the command of the LORD my God". And with that he could have sent the Moabites away. But he did not. He told them to stay the night while he found out what else the Lord would tell him—hoping, no doubt, that it might be something different!

From that point the Lord decided to use Balaam in his duplicity as the instrument of the most sublime expression of His own power and purpose with Israel. That night God came to Balaam and said, "Since these men have come to summon

* Quotations as part of the narrative from Numbers 22–24 are from the NIV.