

Christian Messenger.

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THE TEACHER.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1873.

SUNDAY, April 6th, 1873.
Israel—The New Name.—Gen. xxxii. 24-30.

GOLDEN TEXT.—'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.' vs. 29.

COMMIT TO MEMORY.—Verses 26-30.

SUMMARY.—'My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.'

ANALYSIS.—I. The wrestling. vs. 24, 25. II. The conversation. vs. 26-29. III. The name. vs. 30.

EXPOSITION.—The parting.—We left Jacob at Bethel. We remember why he came there, how he slept, what was his vision, God's blessing given to him, and his vow made to God. Ch. xxviii. 10-20.

Meanwhile.—He started on the day of his vow, pushed on to Haran, in Mesopotamia, a long journey for the times when steam-cars were unknown, between 300 and 400 miles; came to the place where his grandfather had once dwelt, and his grandfather's brother had permanently settled. Gen. xxiv. 10; xxvii. 34. Fell in with his uncle Laban and his uncle's two daughters, Leah and Rachel; worked fourteen years for his uncle, in order to secure his cousin Rachel for a wife; at the end of the first seven years, when Rachel, whom he wanted, was due, was obliged to take Leah, whom he did not want (poetic justice); worked seven years longer to acquire possessions, and was greatly prosperous; at the command of the Wonderful Angel, who had appeared to him at Bethel, and who promised to be with him to the last, secretly fled from his cunning and unwilling uncle; was pursued and overtaken by the enraged man; was delivered through God's special aid; sent messengers and princely presents to appease his angry brother, coming on to meet and slay him; reached the river Jabbok (an eastern branch of the Jordan, and emptying into its midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea), and transferred his family from the north to the south side of the stream. At this point in the narrative, our lesson begins. (See ch. xxviii. 32.)

Verse 24.—Jacob was left alone, probably on the north side of the stream, possibly on the south. Alone, and why? Why, after the fatigue and worry of the previous day, was he not in the company, taking rest with them? We have seen thus far the unamiable side of Jacob's character. But we greatly misunderstand him, if we regard him as mere cunning and unmixt depravity. He was a man, unlike Esau, of an ample, varied nature—one of those complex and comprehensive spirits which, seen on one side only, you despise and abhor; but seen on another side, you love and admire. Just the man was he to have within such conflict as to a less complex spirit can never be known. He is alone now, in the solemn silence of night, under the arching star-lit heavens. His brother, against whom he has grossly, basely, sinned, is coming against him with murder in his heart, and an armed force to carry the murder into deed. He deserves to die; he feels this; justice calls for it. God, as the just, must needs be with his brother. It seems as though God, in the person of his brother, were actually about to crush him; to take vengeance on him. Is it really so? Yes and no. So thinks he. "Yes," as conscience, sight, and the reason of sight answers. "No," says the memory of the father's stolen blessing. "No," says the memory of Bethel, of the wondrous voice of the wondrous angel who, from out the heavens, from on the gracious ladder in vision, spake down to him. Behold Jacob, thus inwardly torn and riven, and in horrible inner conflict! For him there is no sleep, and that which is to follow is no mere dream of the night—a vision of his head. Seen thus, we can interpret what follows.

There wrestled a man with him.—'A man,' called in Hosea xii. 4, "the Angel," and in vs. 5, "the Lord" [Jehovah]; "the Lord [Jehovah] God of Hosts;" and here also, in the name Peniel, and the explanation of it, "I have seen God face to face," the man is shown to have been God.

We have that Glorious Being, whom we have once and again seen before "the Angel of Jehovah," called man because appearing in human form; called an angel

because manifested as from God, and called God, or the Lord, because in nature divine: the Eternal Word or Logos, who in the beginning was with God, and was God. Before the incarnation in Jesus Christ, these manifestations of God, in forms adapted to awaken men and meet their sensuous needs, were not infrequent. We have already had, in our lessons, more than one instance. They began in Eden, and ended in the incarnation. This God-angel man wrestled with Jacob. We must take this literal, bodily wrestling with this Being, as intended to express and symbolize spiritual facts. God was for Jacob, and God was against Jacob. We have already seen how and why the inward, contest resulted. There was the old nature with its deeds, which made antagonism with God. Yet with this was faith, wrought in the soul, wherein was God's strength and Spirit. God, as seen in visible facts, in the outward situation was opposing him, as was the man who wrestled. God, in the silent working of his promise, was with Jacob. Hence we see not a mere man as by himself coping with God, but man as having God and God's strength within.

Breaking of the day, which is our idiom. The Hebrew idiom is "the ascending of the morning dawn." The day was the time for action—for movement on Jacob's part. The wrestling was until the time of action.

Verse 25.—It is said that the angel prevailed not against him. This would be absurd as a symbol of man's relation to God, if it were man as in his own strength, and apart from grace. But when one has been "apprehended," i. e., laid hold of, by God, he can apprehend, i. e., lay hold of, God, and then struggle, wrestle; can work out salvation because God works within; can "strive," as did the athletes in the ancient games. How completely helpless mere human strength is, the narrative shows in saying that a touch, a mere touch, of the angel on the part of the body where strength has, as it were, its throne, completely disabled Jacob. How must the pain and the crippling together have made Jacob feel his own helplessness!

Verse 26.—And he [the angel] said, Let me go.—Thus he appears to be still in Jacob's grasp, and even more in his power than before. Let me go, as though he could not escape, and that even when his touch had power to cripple his antagonist, nay, after his touch had crippled him. When man tries to wrest from God a blessing, he may in his striving rely, in a large measure, upon his own wisdom, power, wealth, resources of this or that kind. And then God may strip him of these, or bring him to see that they will not enable him to win; but if the man is really a Christian, and really has hold on God with the hold of faith, this loss does not decrease his power with God. It is almost sure to increase it; to make him hold on with a firmer hold, and wrestle with a more prevailing energy; with an energy not exclusively earthly, but heavenly, given of God. For the day breaketh—the time for your action has come. Now let me go my way, and you go yours. Go your way, and encounter your brother without me. Nay, Jacob dare not, cannot do that. God only is his help, and so he said—what? Why, there was only one thing to be said. He said what faith in the heart always compels the saint to say in these crises of the soul, these turning points of destiny: I will not let thee go except thou bless me. Jacob now knew, if he had not all the time known, the nature of this Being, and with the holy boldness of faith, says to his God: I will not let thee go. So did Kuox cry out: "Lord, give me Scotland or I die." Except thou bless me—the great wish of Jacob's life had been to inherit the blessing of the first born. This, which seems now about to escape from him, must be confirmed, and assurance given that it is not to be lost. The form of blessing changes, but every Christian soul longs, first of all and most of all, for God's blessing.

Verses 27, 28.—And he [the angel] said, What is thy name?—A question asked not, of course, for information, but to turn Jacob's mind into the right channel. We have seen that the name "Jacob" (supplanter), designated his character. He, of course, knew why he bore his name. He receives a new name, according to custom, in token of the new stage of experience. "Israel," whose meaning is here given, is the Scripture's favorite designation of the chosen people, viewed as indeed God's chosen and loved ones; and hence is most fitly applied also to the disciples of Christ—as one body or people—united in him as their head.

Verse 29.—Jacob's request seems to have been suggested by the angel's. He knew what name this angel had borne, but, perhaps, he thought that he was henceforth to appear in some new character. His question is not answered, but his prayer is, for the angel blessed him there. Happy man!

Verse 30.—Peniel—"face of God." We often find this mode of keeping fresh and perpetual in mind the places where great events had occurred. I have seen God, etc., referring to the ancient belief that a man would die if he were to have a sight of God.

QUESTIONS.—Give the story of Jacob from the time we then left him at Bethel. Had the promise made him at Bethel (chap. xxviii. 15) been thus far fulfilled? Va. 24. Near what stream was Jacob? vs. 22.—What do you know of the stream? In which direction was Jacob travelling? What had he done with his family? vs. 23. Why should he remain alone? Who appeared? See vs. 28, 30; Hosea xii. 4, 5. Have our previous lessons taught us of this Being? What did he do to Jacob? Was this a vision, or a real wrestling? Why should this Being wrestle with Jacob? Until what time did he wrestle? Va. 25. Did he prevail? What did he then do? What result? What does this show as to this angel's power? Why had he not prevailed? What spiritual truth is here symbolized? Va. 26. What did he say to Jacob? Why mention the breaking of day? Had he not power to escape? By what power can we hold on upon God? What is our strength? 1 Cor. xii. 9. What answer did Jacob give? Va. 27. Why did the angel ask this question? chap. xxvii. 36. Va. 28. Why the change of name? Meaning of "Israel"? Who are the true spiritual Israel? Rom. ix. 6, 7; ii. 28, 29. Va. 29. What did Jacob ask? What did he get?

Abridged from the Baptist Teacher. Scripture Catechism, 108, 109.

SUNDAY, April 13th.—The Dreams of Joseph.—Gen. xxxvii. 3-11.

"THE OLD, OLD STORY."

ARRANGED FOR A SABBATH SCHOOL CONCERT EXERCISE.

The Story is asked for by a class of eight of the smallest scholars, four girls and four boys. Let them stand in a semi-circle, facing the audience, the tallest in the centre, and begin to number at each end.

No. 1 of the girls repeats: "Tell me the old, old story, Of unseen things above—Of Jesus and his glory, Of Jesus and his love."

No. 1 of the boys: "Tell me the story simply, As to a little child; For I am weak and weary—And helpless and defiled."

No. 2 of the girls: "Tell me the story slowly, That I may take it in—That wonderful redemption, God's remedy for sin."

No. 2 of the boys: "Tell me the story often, For I forget so soon, The early dew of morning Has passed away at noon."

No. 3 of the girls: "Tell me the story softly, With earnest tones and grave. Remember, 'In the sinner Whom Jesus came to save."

No. 3 of the boys: "Tell me the story always, If you would really be, In any time of trouble, A comforter to me."

No. 4 of the girls: "Tell me the same old story, When you have cause to fear That this world's empty glory Is costing me too dear."

No. 4 of the boys: "Yes, and when that world's glory Shall dawn upon my soul, Tell me the old, old story, 'Christ Jesus makes thee whole.'" SONG.

The Story is told by one of the elder scholars. She repeats: "You ask me for the story Of unseen things above—Of Jesus and His glory, Of Jesus and his love."

"Listen and I will tell you—God help both you and me, And make the old, old story His message unto thee."

"Once in a pleasant garden, God placed a happy pair—And all within was peaceful, And all around was fair." Let these Bible references be repeated by members of the school. 1st scholar, Gen. ii. 8-15.

They longed for, took, and tasted— They ate it, and they died." 2d scholar, Gen. iii. 2, 3, 6; Gen. v. 5.

"Yet in His love and pity, At once the Lord declared, How man, though lost and ruined, Might, after all, be spared." 3rd scholar, John iii. 15.

"He should be son of Adam, But Son of God as well, And bring a full salvation, From sin, and death, and hell." 5th scholar, Luke iii. 38; 1 Cor. xv. 22, 45.

"Hundreds of years were over, Adam and Eve had died— The following generation, And many more, beside."

"At last some shepherds, watching Beside their flocks at night, Were startled in the darkness, By strange and holy light."

"One of the heavenly angels Had come from heaven above, To tell the true, true story Of Jesus and His love."

"He came to bring ' glad tidings'— You need not, must not fear, For Christ, your new-born Saviour, Luce in the village near."

"And many other angels Took up the story then, To God on high, be glory— Good will and peace to men." 6th scholar, Luke ii. 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14.

"They went at once to see, And found Him in a manger, And knew that it was He." 7th scholar, Luke ii. 16.

"He whom the Father promised So many ages past, Had come to save poor sinners— Yes, He had come at last."

"He was content to do it— To seek and save the lost, Although He knew beforehand— Knew all that it would cost." 8th scholar, Luke i. 68; xix. 10.

"His path in life was lowly— He was a working man, Who knows the poor man's trials So well as Jesus can?" 10th scholar, Mark vi. 2, 3 first clause; Heb. ii. 16, 17, 18.

"His last three years were lovely, He could no more be hid— And time and strength would fail me To tell the good He did." 11th scholar, Luke vii. 22; John xxi. 25.

"He gave away no money, For He had none to give, But He had the power of healing, And made dead people live." 12th scholar, Luke vii. 11-16.

"He did it all so kindly, It seemed His heart's delight To make poor people happy From morning until night." 13th scholar, Matt. ix. 36.

"He always seemed at leisure For every one who came, However tired and busy, They found him just the same." 14th scholar, Mark iii. 20; Heb. xiii. 8; Luke v. 15.

"He heard each tale of sorrow With an attentive ear, And took away each burden, Of suffering, sin and fear." 15th scholar, Luke viii. 48; John viii. 11; Matt. xiv. 27.

"He was a 'man of sorrows' And when he gave relief, He gave it like a Brother, Acquainted with our grief." 16th scholar, Isa. liii. 3.

"The gentle, holy Jesus, Without a spot or stain, By wicked hands was taken, And crucified and slain."

"Look! look!—if you can bear it— Look at your dying Lord! Stand near the cross and watch Him! Behold the Lamb of God!"

"His hands and feet are pierced, He cannot hide his face— And cruel men stand, staring In crowds, ab out the place."

"They laugh at Him, and mock Him They tell him to come down And leave the cross of suffering, And change it for a crown" 17th scholar, Luke xxiii. 33-38.

"Yes Jesus could have done it, But let me tell you why He would not use His power, But chose to stay and die."

"For our sins He suffered, For our sins He died, And 'not for ours only,' But all the world beside." 19th scholar, Isa. liii. 4, 5; 1 Peter ii. 24; 1 John ii. 2.

"And now the work is finished; The sinner's debt is paid, Because on Christ the righteous, The sin of all is laid." 20th scholar, John xix. 30; 1 John iii. 16.

"O, wonderful redemption! God's remedy for sin, The door of heaven is open, And you may enter in." 21st scholar, Rev. iii. 8; John vi. 37; x. 9. f. c.; Rev. xx. 27.

"For God released our Surety, To show the work was done, And Jesus' resurrection Declared the victory won."

"And now He has ascended, And sits upon the throne, To be Prince and Saviour, And claim us for His own." 24th scholar, 1 Cor. xv. 17, 20; Acts v. 30, 31; Heb. vii. 25.

"But when He left His people, He promised them to send The Comforter to teach them, And guide them to the end."

"And that same Holy Spirit Is with us to this day, And ready now to teach us The 'new and living way.'" 23rd scholar, John xvi. 7-13; Joel ii. 28, 29; Heb. x. 19, 22; Matt. xi. 28-30.

"This is the old, old story, Say—do you take it in? This wonderful redemption— God's remedy for sin?"

"Do you at heart believe it? Do you believe it true? And meant for every creature? And therefore meant for you?"

"Then take this great salvation, For Jesus loves to give, Believe, and you receive it— Repent, and you shall live."

"And if this simple message Has now brought peace to you, Make known the old, old story, For others need it too."

"Let every body see it— That Christ has made you free, And if it sets them longing, Say, 'Jesus died for thee.'"

"Soon, soon our eyes shall see Him, And in our home above, We'll sing the old, old story Of Jesus and His love." —S. S. Teacher.

WORK! WORK! —The ruin of most men dates from some vacant hour. Occupation is the armor of the soul. There is a satirical poem, in which the devil is represented as seeking for men, and fitting his baits to the taste and business of his prey; but the idler, he said, gave him no trouble, as he bit the naked hook.

THE BIBLE is very old, but it is as fresh and youthful as ever. Where is there a live book on science of fifty years' standing? But as the Bible grows old, the better the people understand it, the more they love, trust, and are benefited by it. It is a book of our day, adapted to our times; its influence is greater than ever before. It is a live book.