

THE GOD OF JACOB

"The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." Psalm 46:7, 11.

"Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God." Psalm 146:5.

Through the centuries God has always had His people in the world. In the Scriptures this great fact stands out prominently and distinctly. The dealings of God with His people in any one age are instructive and encouraging to those who believe in and serve God in any generation. These great words in our texts speak to the hearts of God's people in times of trial regardless of the century in which they live.

You will notice that in each of these cases in which this name that our Heavenly Father has taken unto Himself occurs it has very high and lofty connections. It is not a name to be passed over lightly. God has honored this name of His in the very associations in which it is brought before us in these verses that I have read.

I. "The Lord of Hosts."

In the Bible God is revealed by His titles as well as by the statements concerning His nature and the descriptions of His actions. No title can give us a higher conception of the power and glory of God than this one which we meet so often, "Jehovah of hosts." Jehovah was the name which most forcefully gave expression to the facts concerning God which were beyond human comprehension. This title, "Jehovah," speaks of the continuousness of God, the self-determining power of the Most High, and His inward sufficiency, so that there is nothing beyond His consciousness. This phrase, "Jehovah of hosts," teaches us that Jehovah is absolute, superior and sufficient. It declares to us that God is the Lord of the heavens and all their inhabitants.

Two thoughts are involved in this simple and yet profound statement, "The Lord of hosts is with us." He is with us in His Word and in His works as a reassuring and sustaining presence. Secondly, He is with us in our struggles. Countless forms of evil are arrayed against us.

Sometimes they appear to be unconquerable. Those who struggle against the numerous forces of evil are often discouraged, downhearted and almost overwhelmed. When in that frame of mind it is so helpful to recall the encouraging statement, "The Lord of hosts is with us." To say the least, this statement brings reinforcement for the conflicts without.

II. "The God of Jacob".

Few of God's names are more suggestive than "the God of Jacob." It is very instructive and comforting to find that God is willing to have His name so closely associated with that of a human being. The change from "Jehovah of hosts" to "the God of Jacob" is very significant. It brings us from the height of heaven and its glory to the depth of earth and its need. It is a wonderful thing that the same great being who is known as "Jehovah of hosts" is equally well known as "the God of Jacob." The

first view presents Him in His almightiness, and the second portrays Him in His approachableness. The King of the celestial armies is the God Who is near to a needy man. There is no contradiction here. It is simply two views of the same God. If we did not have this second conception of God to balance the other, we should think of Him as being far beyond our reach; as removed in His lofty splendor from any approach on our part. Happily for us, both of these thoughts are tied together in these verses of Scripture. It is truly marvelous that "Jehovah of hosts" should also be "the God of Jacob."

Let us consider the tremendous significance of the fact that such a Being as Jehovah called Himself "the God of Jacob." Who was Jacob, and what was his record? He was a weak and sinful man. He was not an Enoch who walked with God and was too righteous to be left on earth. He was not an Abraham, the father of the faithful and the friend of God. He was not even an Isaac, the pure, gentle, meditative and devout servant of God. No, he was a crafty, grasping and unscrupulous man of the world. He was peculiarly ignoble and base in his method of obtaining his worldly desires. Jacob was a supplanter, a liar and a cheat. He defrauded his brother and then ran away from just, though vindictive, anger.

More than a fourth of Genesis, a book which covers 2,300 years of human history, is taken up with God's dealings with Jacob. From the record of his birth in chapter twenty-five to the experience at Peniel, which is recorded in chapter thirty-two, Jacob is revealed as a problem character and a despicable person. For two-thirds of his life he was hampered by a difficult temperament. It is quite possible that he blamed Isaac and Rebekah for passing it on to him. He might have said that he inherited the worst characteristics of both his parents. When one boy was giving his parents trouble, the father would say to himself and to his wife, "There is nothing in him that we have not put there." Be that as it may, children are always a revelation of their parents and their homes.

Esau was a cunning hunter, but Jacob was a cunning schemer. The short description of Jacob as a quiet man, dwelling in tents, has in it a world of suggestion. Do you suppose that while he was sitting quietly in the tent that he was doing nothing? Not at all! Judged by his after life he was sitting there planning and scheming for personal advancement and security. Jacob was a shrewd man, a man who could bide his time. He waited for the psychological moment to seize the birthright; he waited fourteen years to obtain the woman he wanted.

It is my opinion that in many things Abraham would have been ashamed of his grandson. On various occasions it would have been embarrassing for Abraham to say, "Yes, Jacob is my grandson." And yet Almighty God, without any shame or apology, said, "I am his God." Since He was Jacob's God, He also can be my God. Like Jacob, many of us have difficult temperaments. In view of this fact, a paraphrase of the sentence, "The Lord of hosts is with us," would be this: "The God of difficult people is our refuge; the Lord of misfits and problem characters is our resort."

In order to learn the significance of this Divine name, "the God of Jacob," the simple and natural thing is to go back to God's dealings with Jacob, and see what we can discover from them as to the meaning of this name. What did God do for Jacob?

1. God planned and sought the best for Jacob.

Let us go back to the record of Jacob and see how God thought and planned for him. Let us look at the beginning, and note how little else there was of promise for the future in his case. Genesis twenty-five takes us into the home from which Jacob came, and from which God led him into all the blessedness He had planned for him. We find here a home where there was so little that prophesied that Jacob would ever be anything, or become anybody, or do anything.

God's Word says, "And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob" (Genesis 25:27-28). The father loved his son, Esau, because he got his meat from him for nothing. Rebekah loved Jacob with a partial love that would have ruined him if God had not intervened and planned something better. One brother was ready to take advantage of his brother's passing hunger to obtain the birthright, while the other was ready to part so lightly with what he should have prized very highly. Will anything great and blessed ever come out of these boys in this home? No, not unless God steps in and does something about the situation. Into that home God went, and laid His hand upon Jacob, and led him forth.

It is a grand thing to have God planning for you. God has repeated this miracle many times. Sir George Williams was the youngest of eight sons in a farmer's family. In that family there were high traditions of farming. At thirteen George quit school, but there were doubts in his family about him becoming a successful farmer. Time proved that he could not succeed at farming. The parents and brothers decided to send George to Bridgwater and make a draper of him. They were convinced that his place was behind the counter. But into the draper's shop "the God of Jacob" came; and one memorable Sunday night, after George Williams came home from a church service, at the back of the draper's shop he knelt down and received Christ as his Saviour, and yielded his life entirely to Him. God took him, filled his heart with love for his companions and zeal for their salvation, made him a soul-winner yonder in Bridgwater, took him to London, made him a soul-winner among his associates there, extended his work until he became one whom the Christian world delighted to honor; and they buried him in St. Paul's Cathedral. That is what comes from having "the God of Jacob" to think and plan for you.

Who had the highest thought for George Williams? Was it his father, or his mother, or his brothers? Neither. The best thought for him was in the heart of "the God of Jacob." It is an infinite joy to me to think that every Christian has a God Who seeks the best for him or her. You need not miss your way in life at all. You need not die mourning that your life has been a failure. You need not go into eternity feeling that you have missed the best. Why? Because "the God of Jacob" will come into your life with loving thought, with tremendous purpose, and with all the resources of His grace. He will do His very best for you. Some of us are old enough now to look back in genuine and amazed gratitude for what God has done for us. We realize now that no fond mother or no kind father ever thought for us as God did, but that from the beginning He planned and wrought for us. The chief joy of eternity will be that in life's brief day "the God of Jacob" was our God.

2. God disciplined Jacob and sustained him under it.

When God takes us in hand, and plans for us, He proceeds to put us under the discipline whereby His purposes can be accomplished. Jacob's appointed discipline was found in those years with Laban. Was Laban a "nice" person, to use a word that is often on our lips today? Not at all. He was a keen, shrewd, hard and selfish man of the world. At the end of the long years of labor, Laban would have sent Jacob away without any money in his pocket. That was the man who, under God, made Jacob. Being a selfish man himself, Jacob was placed with Laban, who was far more selfish than himself. After wincing under the mean selfishness of Laban day after day, Jacob finally woke up and realized that there was something very unpleasant and entirely wrong about selfishness.

God was with Jacob all the long years of his discipline. To his wives, Rachel and Leah, Jacob said, "The God of my father hath been with me" (Genesis 31:5). It is better to be with the worst Laban on earth and have God with you than it would be to live with an angel. Then, Laban was not permitted to harm Jacob. Jacob reminded his wives, "Your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times; but God suffered him not to hurt me" (Genesis 31:7). Laban said, "It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt: but the God of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad" (Genesis 31:29). Furthermore, Jacob never allowed Laban to turn him from his uprightness. He said to him, "God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight" (Genesis 31:42).

When a man can talk as much and as sincerely to God about the work of his hands as about his Laban and his trying ways, he is in a high state of grace. Through all those long years Jacob never said, "Laban, I will give you as much as you send. I will pay you back in your own coin." Can you honestly say, "For forty years I have been under the discipline of my Laban, or a series of them, and never once have I been turned from my integrity before God, and retaliated in a manner unworthy of a man who has God as his help and his refuge"? All honor to Jacob that, at the end of the forty years, he could speak to God, not only of the wrongs that Laban had done him, but of his own fidelity to his duty and his God.

Don't interfere with God's discipline; don't be running away from your Laban; don't be turned from the uprightness of your heart. It is only through enduring what taxes you to your very utmost that God can make of you what He desires. People who are always running away from their Labans never accomplish much for God or for others.

3. God was with Jacob in his sore trials.

Jacob was afraid of Esau and was greatly distressed at the very thought of his coming. He prayed to God saying, "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" (Genesis 32:11). It is part of our appointed discipline on earth that we should all come, sooner or later, into hours of unspeakable dreads. Sooner or later, all of us have to come to critical and tremendous hours when, if God be not our help and our joy, brain will reel and heart will break. I rejoice in knowing from experience, and am happy to tell you, that

God will be with you in life's trials as He was with Jacob. Under the influence of his great fear, Jacob got alone with God. He felt that only God could help him. He believed that God alone stood between him and unspeakable disaster. In life's greatest trials God can and will bring you through a richer, better and happier person. Triumph in life's worst and darkest hours through the God of all grace and comfort.

"The God of Jacob is our refuge." This sin-forgiving, prayer-hearing and promise-keeping God is our refuge. What is a refuge? A refuge is a place which is easy to reach and safe to protect; a place where weariness is relieved, where wounds are cured and where enemies are defied. God is a safe and adequate refuge in every time of trial.

4. God redeemed Jacob from evil and crowned his life with loving-kindness. In the hour of death Jacob blessed Joseph and said, "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads" (Genesis 48:15-16). It is grand to die like that. None can do it except those happy souls who have "the God of Jacob" for their help. He "redeemed me from all evil." Oh, how much that suggests! What catastrophes, what tragedies, what sorrow and anguish, what dismay are covered by that word! "The God of Jacob is our refuge." But our God has a higher name and title than even this. We thank Him for this, and for all that it means. He is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." If He could do all this for Jacob long centuries ago, what cannot He do for us today, with all the resources of the cross of Christ and with all the resources of the Holy Spirit?