

The Companion of the Way

by

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CHAPTER TWO

THE PATIENT WRESTLER (Genesis 32) - Jacob

I. THE SETTING -- GRACE AND GOVERNMENT

In the life of Jacob we see exemplified the discipline by which GOD deals with the waywardness of His people and leads them on to His purposed goal. How effective it was in Jacob's case is seen in the golden sunset of his life and in his last words to his sons. Speaking to Joseph, he said: **"God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me . . . the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel (of the Lord), which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads"** (Genesis 48:3, 15-16).

It was GOD who had blessed him,
GOD who had fed him,
and GOD, revealed as the Angel of the Lord, who had redeemed him from all evil.

Jacob attributed nothing to self. All was of GOD. The psalmist in his day bore this witness: **"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake"** (Psalm 115:1). (Italics mine). Jacob spoke likewise in his prayer at Peniel: **"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy servant"** (Genesis 32:10).

GOD appeared to Abraham as the GOD of glory; it was surely as the GOD of grace that He revealed Himself to Jacob. The sleeping fugitive pillowed on the stone at Bethel was arrested, not by the anger of the brother from whom he fled, but by a sight of Him who seeks the unworthy and works with them to make them living monuments of His ways in grace and in government.

In his dream Jacob was given:

His First Glimpse

of the realm of order and of light that lies far above this world of sordidness and of sin.

He saw the way that led upward to Heaven and the angels of GOD ascending and descending upon it.

He saw the Lord and heard His voice saying to him, "**In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.**"

Then to this promise GOD added that of His perpetual presence, "**Behold, I am with thee, . . . for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of**" (Genesis 28:14-15).

The response of Jacob to the heavenly vision was to take the stone which had been his pillow of rest and raise it up as his pillar of testimony. Only that upon which we have rested personally can be the substance of our witness, else our testimony would be in word only and not in truth. GOD's acceptance of this response is evident from His words in a later dream of Jacob: "**I am the God of Beth-el, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me**" (Genesis 31:13).

Twenty years elapsed between Jacob's conversion at Bethel and the experience at Penuel, and these showed how feebly he had learned the lessons of the first dream. It had set before him a life of rest, of heavenly-mindedness, of divine guardianship, and of witness, but the years were marred by the scheming which so characterized his behavior.

It is pitiful to see him engaged in a battle of cunning with Laban. It is always contrary to the dignity of the people of GOD for them to be striving with the people of the world, and that in worldly ways. Having deceived his father, Jacob was deceived by his father-in-law.

As He Sowed, He Reaped

Only the faithfulness of GOD sustained him, and delivered him from his sorry position at Padan-aram.

Free at last from the troubles and toils of his service to Laban, Jacob journeyed back to Canaan, but a new and sharper phase of the divine discipline awaited him. At Bethel GOD had shown what He would do *for* him; at Penuel Jacob was to find what GOD would do *with* him. Jacob's concern at this time was his fear of Esau's vengeance. Jacob sent messengers to negotiate with Esau, but the kindness of GOD, which foresaw all and provided for all, anticipated Jacob's move.

"**And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him**" (Genesis 32:1). He had seen them in his dream at Bethel. Once more they were revealed to him, and "**he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim** [i.e., two hosts]" with evident allusion to his own company of family and servants and the company of angels. So fluctuating was his reliance on the power of GOD, in spite of his experience of GOD's keeping, that when the word came, "**Esau . . . cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him,**" he "**was greatly afraid and distressed.**" Was it not enough that GOD's host had met him before Esau's could?

Was it not sufficient in this fresh crisis that GOD had shown to him as He would later to Elisha's servant that "**they that be with us are more than they that be with them**" (II Kings 6:16)?

In one particular especially Jacob is a picture of us all.

How prone we are to act as though GOD needed some help to keep His Word!

Instead of waiting His fullness of time for the fulfillment of His promises, we seek to take matters out of His hand.

Rebekah was guilty of this in her counsel to Jacob to disguise himself as Esau. Had she trusted GOD, she would have seen the blessing of Isaac come to Jacob in GOD's way and would doubtless have been spared the sorrow of the parting. The effect of her example was seen in Jacob through many years. Ever restlessly scheming, he arranged his people and his property to minimize the disaster of Esau's expected attack, and then turned to GOD to ask protection from that which he feared. Evidently his shrewd strategy was his first line of defense. How true to life!

How like him are we!

Nevertheless, there was

Gold Among the Dross

In his extremity Jacob besought the Lord and reminded Him of His promises and of His bidding. GOD has said, "**Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee,**" and earlier at Bethel GOD had said, "**I will surely do thee good.**" GOD will ever hear the prayer of the one who reverently sets before Him His own promises. In spite of the turmoil of his life, Jacob prized the promises, and confessed the mercy and the truth with which GOD had kept His word and blessed him. "**With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands.**" Of himself he said humbly, "**I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant**" (Genesis 32:10). We are reminded of Paul's portrait of himself as "**less than the least of all saints**" (Ephesians 3:8). It may be that in Jacob's case the owning of his unworthiness had in it an allusion to the deceit which had led to his becoming a fugitive, even as in Paul's case there was the memory of his persecution of the Church.

In answer to his prayer, GOD gave him far more than his one petition.

The suppliant asked for deliverance from Esau; GOD gave him what was of greater importance -- victory over Jacob. Little did he realize that before GOD could grant what he sought, He must first bring him to a position of utter helplessness.

Still planning for himself, and not asking GOD for guidance, he arranged a substantial present to appease Esau, and said, "**Afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me**" (Genesis 32:20). But GOD purposed that he should first see another face and enjoy a greater acceptance.

II. THE REVELATION -- GOD'S WAYS NOT MAN'S WAYS

"**And Jacob was left alone**" (Genesis 32:24). Again and again the place of loneliness has been the place of transformation. Ofttimes the divine wisdom permits circumstances in which the believer finds himself bereft. Friends, or health, or wealth may be taken away.

The dreams of eager youth fail of fulfillment.

The stimulus of noble ambition is replaced by the weariness of frustration.

In that solitude One draws near who never forsakes His own.

He has allowed the things that bewilder.

He has permitted the loneliness, that He may satisfy the life with Himself.

No problem baffles Him. No circumstance is beyond His overruling power. With Him the situation is never out of hand.

It was when Job had been stripped of well-nigh all that the Lord, who watched His tried servant, appeared to him in the storm and spoke such words that Job replied at last, "**I know that thou canst do everything . . . I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee**" (Job 42:2, 5). In that revelation Job found not only repentance but "**the end of the Lord**" and proved that "**the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy**" (James 5:11).

"**And there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day**" (Genesis 32:24). To no created angel was this task entrusted. Admittedly, He who thus dealt with Jacob was called "**the angel**" (Hosea 12:4), but this was because He was "**the angel of the Lord**" (see Genesis 31:11, 13, where the angel spoke of Himself thus: "**I am the God of Beth-el**," and Genesis 48:16, where Jacob spoke of Him as "**the Angel which redeemed me**"). In this passage He is spoken of as a man, for His government was beautiful with a gentleness which exactly met the patriarch's need. He had appeared not to overwhelm, but to transform.

Not To Crush, But to Bless

The touch which took away the human strength was the touch of love that would not cause needless pain. The Lord said of His ways with Ephraim as a people: "**I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love**" (Hosea 11:4). So He dealt with Jacob personally. Nor is it otherwise in His dealings with us. At the Incarnation He took humanity into union with His deity, so that He who has said, "**Lo, I am with you alway**" is rich toward us with the fulness of both natures. Illimitable power and exquisite gentleness are linked together, and the wisdom of GOD with the sympathy of personal experience in weariness and suffering.

Nought else we are told of the manner of His appearing to the patriarch. It was He who wrestled with Him. He sought the mastery which alone could bless Jacob's life, but self was strong in Jacob, and he resisted stubbornly till daybreak.

Not until then did Jacob realize who it was who wrestled with him, or the purpose of the mysterious conflict. The struggle went on till the moment of the dawn, which suggested so

vividly the spiritual blessing of the scene, and the discipline suddenly became sharper. "**When he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him**" (Genesis 32:25).

It was the end of Jacob's physical prowess.

His power to war was gone.

What thoughts must have surged through his heart! How should he meet Esau? Was this the end to his prayer to his GOD?

Then came the knowledge of the Person of the wrestler.

Who was this whose touch had such power but who nevertheless refrained from using it till the dawn.

Who was this who had wrestled in long patience?

Only One it could be, even Him who now said: "**Let me go, for the day breaketh**" (Genesis 32:26). To Him he had prayed for deliverance from Esau, but now the prayer had been answered in ways which Jacob had not contemplated. He now learned what many another was to learn through the centuries, that the Lord says, "**My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways**" (Isaiah 55:8).

Jacob's expectation was in the line of his strategy. The Divine response was to take from him his strength, that he might

Cling to the Almighty One

Conscious of this, and broken in spirit as weakened in body, Jacob "**wept, and made supplication unto him**" (Hosea 12:4).

The day was breaking. Ahead lay its toils and cares and the meeting with Esau. But Jacob clung still to his Lord, and said, "**I will not let thee go, except thou bless me**" (Genesis 32:26). Without His presence and His blessing Jacob was helpless. That which he had wrought in the past was no longer possible to him. Others must work, for "**man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening**" (Psalm 104:23).

Jacob's responsibility would now consist in guiding the development of the family from whose twelve sons GOD would make a nation for Himself. Jacob was about to enter the promised Land with those whom GOD had given him, and he must dwell in it as became an heir of promise.

All this demanded an enhanced experience of GOD and relationship with Him, and a renewed blessing.

GOD gave that which was needed and conferred upon Jacob, as earlier upon Abraham, a new dignity. The record now wraps itself around three names, and these we must note in their turn.

Firstly, there is

The New Name

of the patriarch. Of the man who clung to Him and sought His blessing GOD asked, "**What is thy name?**" (Genesis 32:27). Like a shaft of heavenly light searching the inmost depths of the heart, there came the question that brought from him the one word that summed up his ways by nature. Coming from One whose eyes are as a flame of fire, the question drew forth the confession of all the past. "**And he said, Jacob** (supplanter)." No other word could he add. The name told its own tale. Had not his brother said: "**Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times**" (Genesis 27:36).

With Jacob this humbling experience, this revelation of himself to himself, took the form of a crisis. It is not always so.

With some, the conviction that preceded conversion is acute and dread.

With others, especially those who have been converted in early life amid the privileges of a godly home with its shelter from the ways of the world, there is the deepening humiliation of lifelong discovery of the sinfulness of the heart.

But, however it be, there can be no extenuation of that which we are apart from the grace of GOD.

"And he said, thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel (i.e., striver with GOD): **for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed**" (Genesis 32:28). The experience of the night was preserved forever in the new name Israel. As GOD had wrestled with him, so had he wrestled with GOD and had prevailed, yet not by his wrestling, but by his acceptance of its purpose, and by his clinging in utter dependence upon GOD. Jacob strove with GOD, and in the reference in Hosea 12:3, it renders the same verb "**had power**." The emphasis in the giving of the name seems, however, to be upon striving. Israel is therefore a name of strength in weakness -- strength gained by clinging to the strong One. It was not that the man henceforth exhibited always the Israel character. At times he was manifestly Jacob, but the new dignity was his, to be displayed increasingly in his life and to be passed on to the nation which sprang from him, as a reminder that its triumph would ever come from GOD and from His enabling grace.

Then there is

The Hidden Name

of the Wrestler.

"And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there" (Genesis 32:29). The first act of Jacob after receiving his new name was to make the request: "**Tell me thy name**." In that

wonderful moment it was no idle curiosity that prompted his words but a true longing to know the Blesser. This is ever the mark of healthy, spiritual life -- a consuming desire for GOD Himself. Throughout the Scripture this longing is breathed, as in the prayer of Moses: "**that I may know thee**" (Exodus 33:13, see also Phil 3:10). The life given by GOD is satisfied only in its source. "**This is life eternal,**" said the Lord JESUS, "**that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent**" (John 17:3). When the flame of desire to know GOD burns but feebly in our heart, it is time to search our ways before Him, and to pray, "**Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?**" (Psalm 85:6).

That the name was not revealed to Jacob implies no wrongful motive on his part but rather the mystery of that name. Its unfolding could proceed only in keeping with the purposes of GOD for the manifestation of His beloved One.

When in his day Manoah asked the same One (the Angel of the Lord) His name, He replied in words identical with those spoken to Jacob, "**Why askest thou thus after my name?**" (Judges 13:18), but He added, "**seeing it is secret?**" Here again is an anticipation of Isaiah 9:6, "**His name shall be called Wonderful.**"

The name could be declared only when the time had come for the revelation of His person, for the word "**secret**" spoken to Manoah is the same word "**Wonderful,**" in Isaiah 9:6 - His name.

He has been made known abundantly to us in His journey from GOD to GOD (John 13:3), but the fulness of His name is known to no creation. "**He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name**" (Hebrews 1:4). "**God . . . hath . . . given him a name which is above every name**" (Philippians 2:9). "**He had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself**" (Revelation 19:12). "**No man knoweth the Son, but the Father**" (Matthew 11:27).

That infinite name is unfolded in every treasure of His creation, for creation is all His handiwork.

His name is told out in every wonder of the universe, the vastness of which mocks our comprehension. Into its beauty of design and harmony earth's greatest minds have delighted to search, but behind all its phenomena is He who is its ultimate reality, for "**these are parts of his ways**" (Job 26:14).

The name is unfolded in all the wonders of redemption, for this, too, is the work of Him who redeemed us by His precious blood. In the depths of His stoop, in the sufferings of His Cross, in His exaltation from the tomb to GOD's right hand, and in the triumphs of His grace in human lives, the name is declared.

But where else except in the heart of the Father is that redemptive work and its cost fully known? The name is unfolded in all the excellencies of His eternal being; it is the total of what He is -- in His activities, in His relationships, and in His own Person.

The seeking of His name must therefore be the true and eternal quest of the soul.

Finally, there is

The Name of the Place

of the wrestling. When Jacob awoke at Luz, after the dream of the ladder, he called the name of the place Beth-el (the house of GOD), saying, "**This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven**" (Genesis 28:17), but the place of the wrestling he called Peniel (the face of GOD), saying, "**I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved**" (Genesis 32:30).

How evident was the enrichment of his spiritual experience! The house of GOD -- the face of GOD! Once it was GOD's abode; now it is GOD Himself!

III. THE BLESSING -- THE LIGHT OF THE MORNING

No detail is given of the specific blessing imparted to Jacob by GOD at Peniel, save that "**he blessed him there**" -- there, where the man whose thigh He had touched bowed to the meaning of the discipline, and where a mortal being conscious of the presence of GOD looked into His face and sought to know His name.

The record throws a veil over the terms of the blessing. Indeed, that which is between the soul and GOD can never be fully known by another. Yet it was blessing imparted personally, and it strengthened the heart of Jacob with its assurance of the certainty of the Lord's purpose for him.

Calm in its promise, he could face Esau and all the way that stretched unseen into the future.

Beyond the wrestling, with the new dignity it brought, and beyond the receiving of the blessing, sovereign and irrevocable, was the supreme good of the sight of the face of GOD.

Jacob had thought only of seeing Esau's face, but GOD had interposed the vision that alone can satisfy. In so doing, GOD had taught the lesson required not only by Jacob but by every generation of believers -- and by none more than ourselves -- that only as we have seen the face of GOD are we equipped to see the face of men.

In the light of His face is our salvation along the journey of life: "**Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved . . . Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved . . . Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved**" (Psalm 80:3, 7, 19), whether from the fear of men or from the snares of this world, and we are enabled thankfully to say, "**Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased**" (Psalm 4:7). Without the shining of His face, we are as other men. "**Hide not thy face from me,**" prayed the psalmist, "**lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit**" (Psalm 143:7). To the believing heart that vision is its own beatitude, and its wonder gleams throughout the Scriptures from the early records to the last witness of Revelation, "**They shall see his face**" (Revelation 22:4).

To the patriarch it was a matter of awe that he should see the face of GOD and yet be permitted to live.

Likewise spoke Gideon and Manoah when they, too, saw the Angel of the Lord. In a sense, it

was a glimpse beforehand of that which gives Heaven its supreme blessedness, and therefore it spoke of acceptance with GOD. Such it was, but not for Jacob's sake alone. He saw the face of One whom he called Redeemer: **"The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth"** (Genesis 48:16), and we also, by faith, have gazed on the Saviour's face and have been accepted for His sake.

Not for nought is it recorded that as Jacob **"passed over Penuel**

The Sun Rose Upon Him" (Genesis 32:31).

Its gladdening warmth cheered his halting steps, but more than that, it figured the rising upon his gaze of a greater Sun. The time is coming when upon those that fear His Name **"shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings,"** and Israel's long, dark night shall be over, and the King of glory **"shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds"** (II Samuel 23:4).

The day came, and with it the meeting with Esau, but the overruling care of GOD brought the brothers together not to strive but to weep.

GOD was faithful to His servant and displayed the certainty of His promise, **"I am with thee, and will keep thee."**

So will He be with us and keep us and lead through life's discipline till the dawn of eternal day and the seeing face to face.

~ end of chapter 2 ~