

Israel: A Prince with God

The Story of Jacob Retold

F. B. Meyer, B.A.

No Copyright

CHAPTER ONE

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Genesis 25

“One adequate support
For the calamities of mortal life
Exists one only: an assured belief
That the procession of our fate, howe'er
Sad or disturbed, is ordered by a Being
Of Infinite benevolence and power;
Whose everlasting purposes embrace
All accidents, converting them to good.”

- Wordsworth

AN old-world story this! In its strange Eastern dress, it appears to be as remote from us as the garb of an Arab, or the barter of an Oriental bazaar. And yet human life is much the same, whether lived eighteen hundred years on this side or eighteen hundred years on that side of the Cross; whether hidden beneath our broadcloth, or the flowing robes of an Arab Sheikh; whether spent in modern towns, or on the free, open pasture-lands of Southern Palestine.

Our critics complain of our poring over these time-worn pages of ancient biography; but, with all deference to them, we feel bound to say that we learn better how to live, we inhale more spiritual ozone, we see further into the reasons of God's dealings with men, when doing so, than when scanning the pages of yesterday's newspaper, or of a society journal.

With human life and discipline, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. Souls grasp hands across the intervening centuries. Thousands of miles cannot part us from our kin across the seas; and thousands of years cannot part us from our kin across the ages, or sever the readers of these words who daily weep over an often-dropt ideal from that son of Isaac, who, nearly drowned in the seas of his own craft and cunning, at length emerged a new man, and a prince with God. There are many reasons which invest this story with absorbing interest:

I. JACOB WAS THE FATHER OF THE JEWISH RACE, AND A TYPICAL JEW

- The Jews called themselves by the name of Jacob; and surnamed themselves by the name of Israel (Isaiah 44:5).
- God calls them children of Israel.

- We call them Israelites.
- We speak of Jacob, rather than Abraham, as the founder of the people to which he gave his name; because, though Abraham was their ancestor, yet he was not so exclusively.

He is the founder of a yet richer, mightier line. The wild son of the desert claims him as father equally with the bargain-loving Jew. Nor is that all. We Gentiles have reason to be proud to trace back our lineage to the first great Hebrew, the man who crossed over * and whom God designated as His friend. He is the father of all who believe: **“not of the circumcision only; but of those who walk in the steps of the faith which he had, even before he was circumcised”** (Romans 4:12).

*** The word “Hebrew,” according to the generally-accepted interpretation, signifies the man who had crossed the river-flood - the man who came from beyond the Euphrates. (See Stanley’s *Jewish Church*, i, p. 10).**

We go to make up the sands on the shore and the stars of the heavens, which he saw in the visions of God (Genesis 24:17). But Jacob is the typical Jew. His life is the epitome of that wonderful people, who are found in every country and belong to none; who supply us with our loftiest religious literature, and are yet a by-word for their craft, their scheming, and their love of money; who have supplied us with our highest ideals of nobility, and our lowest types of villainy; who have played so great a part in the history of the past, and are only waiting now for the final catastrophe which is to replace them in the van of the world’s progress.

No thoughtful man can ignore this wonderful people. Their history is, without doubt, the key to the complications of modern politics; and it may be that their redemption is to be the fruit of that mighty travail, which is beginning to convulse all peoples, announced as it is, by throes of earthquake and the rumours of war.

If we can understand the life of Jacob, we can understand the history of his people. The extremes which startle us in them are all in him. Like them, he is the most successful schemer of his times; and, like them, he has that deep spirituality, that far-seeing faith, which are the grandest of all qualities, and make a man capable of the highest culture that a human spirit can receive. Like them, he spends the greatest part of his life in exile, and amid trying conditions of toil and sorrow; and, like them, he is inalienably attached to that dear land, his only hold on which was by the promise of God and the graves of the heroic dead. But Jacob’s character was purified by tremendous discipline.

The furnace into which he was cast was heated one seven times more than it is wont to be heated for ordinary men. He stands among the peers in the kingdom of sorrow; and through it all he passed into a peerage of moral and spiritual power, which made the mightiest monarch of his times bend eagerly for a blessing from his trembling hand. Through such discipline his people have been passing for centuries; and surely, before its searching fires, the baser elements of their natures will be expelled, until they recognize the true Joseph of their seed who has sent them many generous gifts; whom yet they have not known; but towards whom they are certainly being brought.

Then shall they share His glory (Genesis 45:13, 18); and they shall be amongst many people, “**as a dew from the Lord**” (Micah 5:7); yea, in them shall be fulfilled the ancient promise, “**I will bless thee; and thou shalt be a blessing**” (Genesis 12:2).

II. JACOB ALSO HAS SO MANY POINTS OF CONTACT WITH OURSELVES

Newman has said truly, “Abraham was a hero; Jacob was a plain man dwelling in tents. Abraham we feel to be above ourselves; Jacob like ourselves. We no longer stand in the unclouded golden dawn of the patriarchal age; it is overcast with clouds, and is more like our own chequered life.”

His failings speak to us.

- He takes advantage of his brother when hard pressed with hunger.
- He deceives his father.
- He meets Laban’s guile with guile.
- He thinks to buy himself out of his trouble with Esau.
- He mixes, in a terrible mangle, religion and worldly policy.
- His children grow up to hatred, violence, and murder.
- He cringes before the distant Egyptian governor, and sends him a present.

Mean, crafty and weak, are the least terms we can apply to him. But, alas! who is there that does not feel the germs of this harvest to be within his own breast, hidden there as seed-germs in a mummy-case, and only waiting for favourable conditions to ripen them to the same disastrous growth. “There goes myself, but for the grace of God.”

His aspirations speak to us.

- We too, have our angel-haunted dreams, and make our vows, when we leave home.
- We, too, count hard work a trifle, when inspired by all-mastering love.
- We, too, cling in a paroxysm of yearning to the departing angels, that they should bless us ere they go.
- We, too, get back to our Bethels, and bury our idols.
- We, too, confess ourselves pilgrims and strangers on the earth.
- We, too, recognize the shepherd care of God (Genesis 48:15).
- We, too, wait for God’s salvation (Genesis 49:18).

His sorrows speak to us. In every life there is:

- A leaving home to go forth alone; and
- A weary struggle for existence; and
- A limp which reminds us of some awful crisis; and
- An *Allon-bachuth* (an oak of weeping, Genesis 35:8); and
- A lonely grave on the way to Ephrath, which holds some priceless jewel-case; and
- A lost Joseph; and the grey hairs of sorrow.

And we have mourned over hopes, which have mocked us with their non-fulfillment; “**I have not attained**” (Genesis 47:9).

What a comfort it is to find that the Bible saints, who now shine as stars in the firmament of heaven, were men of like passions with ourselves! They were not always saints: they sinned, and murmured, and rebelled as we do.

Heaven’s rarest blades were not wrought of finer metal than that which is within our constitution. God’s choicest vessels were not turned from superior earth to that of which we are made. The jewels which now lie at the foundation of the new Jerusalem were once obscure, unnamed men of no finer texture than ourselves. Look to the quarry whence they were hewn, and the hole of the pit whence they were digged; and say if there was much to choose between their origin and your own. And then, take heart; for if God were able to take up such men as Jacob, and Simon Bar-Jona, and make of them princes and kings, surely He can do as much for you.

The discipline may be keen as fire; but the result shall be glorious: and all eternity shall ring with the praises of Him who raises up the poor out of the dust, and lifts up the beggar from the dunghill, and makes them kings and priests unto God.

III. IN JACOB WE CAN TRACE THE WORKINGS OF DIVINE LOVE

“**Jacob have I loved** “ (Malachi 1:2).

It was pre-natal love.

Before the child was born, it was the object of God’s love (Romans 9, 11). In God’s heart all his members were written, when as yet there was none of them. Though God forecasted his disposition and habits, yet He loved him. It is ever sweet to rest on a love which is dated not in time but eternity; because one feels that as God’s love did not originate in any unforeseen flash of excellence in us, so it will not be turned away by any unexpected outbreak of depravity. It did not begin because of what we were; and it will continue in spite of what we are.

It was fervent love.

So strong that, in comparison, the love which shone around Esau might be almost termed hatred (Romans 9:13). For God loved Esau as he loves all men. He hates nothing that He has made. But there were as many degrees of temperature between His love to Jacob and that to Esau, as there are in human hearts between love and hate. Sometimes in an early morning the moon shines in the same sky as the sun her beams still fall on all things; but one might almost assert that she did not shine, by reason of the brilliance of his beams. So was it with these two men. And who shall find fault? There must be degrees in the love of God. Was there not one disciple “**whom Jesus loved**”? (See also Matthew 10:37 and Luke 14:26).

It was a disciplinary love.

We have low thoughts of love. We can only count that as love which caresses, and soothes, and says sweet things, and makes of itself a shield so that no rough wind may breathe on us. We have no notion of a love that can say, "No"; that can use the rod, and scourge, and fire; that can sustain the long discipline by which the mean and false and evil elements are driven out of the beloved soul. But such is the love of God. **"The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that"** (Titus 2:11-12).

So it came to Jacob. If we had been asked to tell which of these two men was Heaven's favorite, we should, in all likelihood, have selected the wrong one. Here stands Esau, the shaggy, broad-shouldered, red-haired huntsman, equipped with bow and arrows, full of generous impulse, affectionate to his aged father, forgiving to the brother who had done him such grievous wrong. He became a chieftain of renown, and the ancestor of a princely line (Genesis 36). He was happy in his wives and children; we read of no such outbreaks as embittered Jacob's lot. He was so rich that he could make light of Jacob's presents; and so powerful that Jacob's company was helpless in his hand. His people were happily settled in their rich territories; whilst the children of Jacob were groaning in Egyptian bondage. And, as we consider him, we are inclined to imitate the words of Samuel, when Jesse's eldest son entered his presence, and say: **"Surely, the Lord's anointed is before Him!"**

There, on the other hand, is Jacob.

- In his young manhood, an exile from his father's house.
- In his mature manhood, a hireling, in the employ of a kinsman.
- In his declining years, worn by anxiety and trouble.
- In his old age, a stranger in a strange land.

Few and evil were the days of the years of his pilgrimage. Yet he was the beloved of God; and it was because of that especial love that he was exposed to such searching discipline. **"Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth"** (Hebrews 12:6).

Earthly prosperity is no sign of the special love of Heaven; nor are sorrow and care any mark of God's disfavor, but the reverse. **"Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When He had heard, therefore, that he was sick, He abode . . . where He was,"** and let Lazarus die. God's love is robust, and true, and eager not for our comfort, but for our lasting blessedness; it is bent on achieving this, and it is strong enough to bear misrepresentation and rebuke in its attempts to attune our spirits to higher music. It therefore comes instructing us.

- Let us enter ourselves as pupils in the school of God's love.
- Let us lay aside our own notions of the course of study;
- Let us submit ourselves to be led and taught;
- Let us be prepared for any lessons that may be given from the black-board of sorrow;
- Let us be so assured of the inexhaustible tenacity of His love, as to dare to trust Him, though He slay us.
- Let us look forward to that august moment when He will give us a reason for all life's discipline, with a smile that shall thrill our souls with ecstasy, and constrain sorrow and sighing to flee away forever.

IV. JACOB'S LIFE GIVES A CLUE TO THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

There was election here. The Apostle Paul uses it to illustrate that mysterious truth (Romans 9, 11). And it is obviously so. Jacob was the younger son; and his life is as much a Gospel for younger sons as is that matchless parable of the prodigal. The children were not born when God foretold and fixed their destiny.

It is impossible to ignore election; it has been truly said to be the key to the order of all nature and history. "There are elect angels; elect stars; elect races of animals; elect flowers and fruits; elect human souls. Nowhere do we meet with equality, uniformity, the monotony of a dull level. Everywhere things and beings, with superior endowment to other things and beings, seem made to head them, and sweep them along in the orbit of their motion by the attraction of the superior on the inferior spheres. One star differeth from another star in glory; some flash forth resplendent, regal gems in the diadem of night, while others are scattered faint and dim like seed-pearls on her dusky robe."

So is it with races. Some, like the Anglo-Saxon, stand forth in the foremost rank, the pioneers in civilization, the easy masters of the world. Others, like the Hottentot, drag on a dull existence, which, when at high-water mark, is little removed above the brutes that share with them the forest glades.

So is it with souls. Some men are evidently born to be the leaders, teachers, masters of mankind. Thus it was with Jeremiah the prophet (Jeremiah 1:5); with Cyrus the conqueror (Isaiah 45:1, 4); and John the Baptist (Luke 1:17) and these are types of myriads more.

But to what are these elect? To comfort, ease, success? Nay, for these things fall to the lot rather of the Esaus than the Jacobs. The elect of God seem chosen to stand in the front rank, and bear the brunt of the storms of sorrow, pain and care. Are they, then, elect to personal salvation? Many of the cases in which the words occur do not demand this as their exclusive meaning. Indeed, Scripture does not certainly exclude Esau himself from a share in Abraham's bosom. He lost his birthright, truly, and he could not recover it by strong cryings and tears; but the loss of his birthright did not necessarily entail the loss of his soul.

But may we not hold that election refers largely, if not primarily, to the service which the elect are qualified to render to their fellows throughout all coming time? They are elect, not for themselves, or for the sake of their own future; but rather for the sake of the work which their position of privilege may enable them to do for mankind.

This, certainly, has been one result of the election of Jacob and his people. They were elect to be the spiritual leaders and teachers of mankind; to furnish us with a matchless religious literature; to provide a suitable platform on which the Saviour of the world should appear, and from which He might influence the world. Not for the sake of their own comfort, but for the sake of the dark and dying world, God gave them light and life, and sustained them in existence against overwhelming odds, and stored in them streams of electric force, as in some mighty battery.

This, then, will explain also the terrific discipline through which they passed. It was needed, not for their sakes alone, but for the race they were destined to serve; that they might be set free from deteriorating influences, and stand forth as God's chosen vessels, brimming with blessing for the world.

Seeking souls need not then concern themselves with this mysterious subject. Outside, the house of salvation, there is no word but this "**whosoever.**"

When once we have crossed the threshold and looked around, we may find some such text as that with which Peter begins his first epistle; and we may find that God had some purpose of mercy to others, when He first drew us to Himself.

But this and many other similar questions will receive new and beautiful illustrations, as we pursue our studies of Jacob's life.

~ end of chapter 1 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
