

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF GENESIS

by

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CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE TO THIRTY-FOUR

WE may here see how groundless were all Jacob's fears, and how useless all his plans. Notwithstanding the wrestling, the touching the hollow of the thigh, and the halting, we find Jacob still planning.

“And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids. And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost.”

This arrangement proved the continuance of his fears. He still anticipated vengeance from the hand of Esau, and he exposed those about whom he cared least to the first stroke of that vengeance. How wondrous are the depths of the human heart! How slow it is to trust God! Had Jacob been really leaning upon God, he never could have anticipated destruction for himself and his family; but alas; the heart knows something of the difficulty of simply reposing, in calm confidence, upon an ever-present, all-powerful, and infinitely gracious God.

But mark now the thorough vanity of the heart's anxiety.

“And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him; and they wept.”

The present was quite unnecessary, - the plan useless.

God “appeased” Esau, as he had already appeased Laban. Thus it is He ever delights to rebuke our poor, coward, unbelieving hearts, and put to flight all our fears.

- instead of the dreaded sword of Esau. Jacob meets his embrace and kiss;
- instead of strife and conflict, they mingle their tears.

Such are God's ways. Who would not trust him?

Who would not honor him with the heart's fullest confidence?

Why is it that, notwithstanding all the sweet evidence of his faithfulness to those who put their trust in him, we are so ready, on every fresh occasion, to doubt and hesitate? The answer is simple: we are not sufficiently acquainted with God.

“Acquaint now thyself with him and be at peace” (Job 22:21).

This is true, whether in reference to the unconverted sinner, or to the child of God.

The true knowledge of God, real acquaintance with him, is life and peace. **“This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent”** (John 17:3). The more intimate our acquaintance with God, the more solid will be our peace, and the more will our souls be lifted above every creature dependence.

“God is a rock,” and we only need to lean our whole weight upon him to know how ready and how able He is to sustain us. After all this manifestation of God’s goodness, we find Jacob settling down in Succoth, and, contrary to the spirit and principles of a pilgrim life, building a house as if it were his home. Now, Succoth was evidently not his divinely-appointed destination. The Lord had not said to him, “I am the God of Succoth; no; but **“I am the God of Bethel.”**

Bethel, therefore and not Succoth, should have been Jacob’s grand object. But alas! the heart is always prone to rest satisfied with a position and portion short of what God would graciously assign. Jacob then moves on to Shechem, and purchases ground, still falling short of the divine mark, and the name by which he calls his altar is indicative of the moral condition of his soul. He calls it **“El-elohe Israel,”** or “God, the God of Israel.”

This was taking a very contracted view of God. True, it is our privilege to know God as our God; but it is a higher thing to know him as the God of his own house, and to view ourselves as part of that house. It is the believer’s privilege to know Christ as his head; but it is a higher thing to know him as the head of his body the Church, and to know ourselves as members of that body.

We shall see, when we come to Chapter 35, that Jacob is led to take a higher and a wider view of God; but at Shechem he was manifestly on low ground, and he was made to smart for it, as is always the case when we stop short of God’s own ground. The two tribes and a half took up their portion on this side of Jordan and they were the first to fall into the enemy’s hand.

So it was with Jacob.

We see, in Chapter 34, the bitter fruits of his sojourn at Shechem.

There is a blot cast upon his family, which Simeon and Levi attempt to wipe out, in the mere energy and violence of nature, which only led to still deeper sorrow; and that, too, which touched Jacob still more keenly than the insult offered to his daughter: **“And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me, to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.”**

Thus it was the consequences in reference to himself that affected Jacob most.

He seems to have walked in constant apprehension of danger to himself or his family, and in the manifestation of an anxious, a cautious, timid, calculating spirit, utterly incompatible with a life of genuine faith in God.

It is not that Jacob was not, in the main, a man of faith; he assuredly was, and as such gets a place amongst the “**cloud of witnesses**” in Hebrews 11. But then he exhibited sad failure from not walking in the habitual exercise of that divine principle.

Could faith have led him to say, “**I shall be destroyed, I and my house?**” Surely not.

God’s promise in Chapter 28:14, 15, should have banished every fear from his poor, timid spirit. “**I will keep thee I will not leave thee.**” This should have tranquillized his heart. But the fact is, his mind was more occupied with his danger among the Shechemites than with his security in the hand of God.

He ought to have known that not a hair of his head could be touched, and therefore, instead of looking at Simeon and Levi, or the consequences of their rash acting, he should have judged himself for being in such a position at all.

If he had not settled at Shechem, Dinah would not have been dishonored, and the violence of his sons would not have been exhibited.

We constantly see Christians getting into deep sorrow and trouble through their own unfaithfulness; and then, instead of judging themselves they begin to look at circumstances, and to cast upon them the blame.

How often do we see Christian parents, for instance, in keen anguish of soul about the wildness, unsubduedness, and worldliness of their children; and, all the while, they have mainly to blame themselves for not walking faithfully before God in reference to their family. Thus was it with Jacob. He was on low moral ground at Shechem; and, inasmuch as he lacked that refined sensibility which would have led him to detect the low ground, God, in very faithfulness, used his circumstance; to chastise him.

“**God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth that shall be also reap.**”

This is a principle flowing out of God’s moral government,- a principle, from the application of which none can possibly escape; and it is a positive mercy to the children of God that they are obliged to reap the fruits of their errors.

It is a mercy to be taught, in any way, the bitterness of departing from, or stopping short of, the living God. We must learn that this is not our rest; for, blessed be God, he would not give us a polluted rest. He would ever have us resting in, and with Himself. Such is His perfect grace; and when our hearts wander, or fall short, His Word is, “**If thou wilt return, return unto me.**”

False humility, which is simply the fruit of unbelief, would lead the wanderer or backslider to take lower ground, not knowing the principle or measure of God's restoration.

The prodigal would seek to be made a servant, not knowing that, so far as he was concerned, he had no more title to the place of a servant than to that of a son; and, moreover, that it would be utterly unworthy of the father's character to put him in such a position.

We must Come to God on a principle and in a manner worthy of himself, or not at all.

~ end of chapter 34 ~

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