

# Israel: A Prince with God

The Story of Jacob Retold

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## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### THE GOD OF JACOB

Psalm 46

“With all thy heart, with all thy soule and mind,  
Thou must Him love, and His behests embrace;  
All other loves with which the world doth blind  
Weake fancies, and stirre up affections base  
Thou must renounce, and utterly displace;  
And give thyself unto Him full and free,  
That full and freely gave Himselfe to thee.”

- Spenser

IT is very comforting to discover in how many parts of Scripture God calls Himself the God of Jacob. He seems to take special delight in the title which links His holy nature with one who, so far from giving promise of saintship, was naturally one of the meanest of men. We should not have been surprised to find Him speaking of Himself as the God of Israel, the Prince; but it is as startling as it is reassuring to find Him speaking of Himself still more often as the God of Jacob.

But as we notice the careful reiteration of the designation especially in the Psalms of David and the prophecies of Isaiah we learn this priceless lesson: that He has not changed since He took Jacob in hand; that He feels towards such characters now as He did when He began his gracious work of renewal in that poor cramped heart; and that He is ready to do as much for all who are conscious of being equally worthless by nature, and who are willing to put themselves into His gracious hands which reach down from Heaven to earth, “molding men.”

There is little doubt that God would do as much for all the readers of these lines, if only they were willing. And it is the object of this closing appeal to urge my readers to let Him have His gracious way with them. As we have studied together Jacob’s life and character, have you not been keenly conscious of similarities between him and yourself? You too may be cunning, crafty, and deceitful; or you may be prone to outbursts of ungovernable temper; or you may be cursed by unholy desires that honeycomb your better nature; or you may be constantly brought into captivity to some tyrannous sin. Now there is no need for this to be your hapless lot for one moment longer, if only you will hand yourself over to the mighty God of Jacob. At the door of a mission hall in a low and degraded neighborhood, a Christian man, one evening, was inviting the passers-by to go in to the service, which was about to commence. “But my coat is in rags,” replied a wretched-looking man.

“That is no matter,” was the answer; “there’s a man inside without a coat at all” It was quite enough to remove all further hesitation; and he entered.

Forgive the simple illustration, by which I wish to press home my meaning on those who may question if their nature is not too ignoble, and their evil habits too confirmed, for them to entertain the hope of saintliness. Your case is not hopeless. If God could make a prince of Jacob, He can do as much for any one. It is hardly possible for one of us to be more hopeless than Jacob was to begin with; and the same Lord who was so rich in mercy to him, will be as rich to all them that call upon Him in truth.

## I. CULTIVATE A HOLY AMBITION

There is no tendency of the unrenewed heart more subtle or dangerous than ambition. “By this sin fell the angels.” And yet, if it is properly curbed and kept, ambition plays a useful part among the motive-forces of human life. It is a bad sign when a lad, or a man, has no desire to improve his position and get on. In all likelihood he will always lie with the rest of the rabble at the bottom of the hill, without the desire or power to stir. And it is well to cultivate a holy ambition to be all that God can make us; to grasp all the possibilities that lie within the reach of faith; and to apprehend that for which we have been apprehended of Christ Jesus.

Such an ambition fired the heart of the Apostle when he said: “**Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after: . . . forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus**” (Philippians 3:12-14).

Does not this stir you? Do not be content to be always a Jacob. Do not settle down to life-long slavery beneath your merciless oppressors. Do not suppose that you must always be what you have been. “**The arrows are beyond thee:**” make for them!

This holy ambition may be aroused by the study of Christian biography. Every time you read or hear of God’s grace being magnified in some beautiful and noble life, thank Him; let your own ideal be raised, and ask Him to do as much for you. But there is nothing which will quicken this sacred spark into a flame so soon as the devout study of the Bible. There are such wonderful openings-up of the possibilities of Christian living and being in almost every paragraph.

Constant familiarity may have rubbed them bright and smooth, like some well-worn coin; but if only we will let the Holy Ghost re-cut them for us, we shall be perfectly astonished. And as, one after another, these ideals of God’s own heart open to our gaze, let us entreat Him “**to fulfil [in us] all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power.**”

Let this be deeply engraven on your heart, as the sacred page is turned that every promise is for you; and that God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or think; and then look up to Him, and claim that He should do as He has said.

## II. MAKE A COMPLETE SURRENDER TO GOD

Before God will commence His gracious work on a human spirit, it must be entirely surrendered to Him. The key of every room, and closet, and cupboard, in the being must be put into His hands. Every province of the life must be placed under His government. There must be no keeping back, no reserve: to withhold one thing, even the least, will vitiate the whole transaction; and leave a foothold for the self-life, from which it will speedily spread back throughout the whole nature.

- Who would take a house recently infected by small-pox, unless the whole of it were thrown freely open to the officers of health?
- Who would pretend to advise a friend involved in financial difficulties, unless the whole of his liabilities were freely disclosed?
- Who would prescribe for a disease, unless the patient told all the symptoms and entirely gave up all other means of cure?

And so God will not undertake the case of any poor child of His unless there be first a complete and entire surrender of the whole being to His gentle healing work.

Some time ago, as I was passing down one of the poorer streets in Leicester, I remarked a notice in the window of a most dilapidated shop, the trade of which had for some time past been ebbing away. The notice was to the following effect: "This shop will shortly be opened under entirely new management."

And as I stood for a moment there, it seemed as if the whole building put on a kind of hopeful smile, as much as to say, "I am so glad that I am to be put under an entirely fresh management." Several days afterwards, as I passed that way again, I found a small army of whitewashes and paper-hangers at work; and on the next occasion, the change in management was evident to the most casual eye, for the whole place had a clean, sweet look about it which was quite attractive.

Now this is just what you require you with the Jacob-nature. You have been trying to manage yourself all too long. A change is evidently needed; but it must be complete. There must be nothing left of yourself at all. Everything must be absolutely surrendered to that mighty God of Jacob whom the Psalmist made his refuge; and who is able to take bankrupt souls, and make them heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. Why should you not make that surrender now?

Instances crowd upon my pen, eagerly asking mention, of those who have entered into experiences of undreamt-of blessing through the strait gate of entire surrender. But I forbear to give them here. It is enough to point the way; and leave all to enter the golden land who will.

When you come to the point of self-surrender, it is highly probable that some one thing will suggest itself to your mind which it is very difficult to transfer from your control to that of the Lord Jesus. You would so much prefer to retain it under your own management. You are not quite sure whether He may not introduce some sweeping and painful changes. You stand in dread, as the lad before he throws himself into the buoyant waves. But such fears are most unworthy of our loving Master. He will take away nothing which it will do us no harm to keep. He never amputates a limb without using some anodyne to lessen the pain without injuring the health.

He will never give us one thrill of anguish from which it would be possible to save us. Do not be afraid of giving all up to the lovely will of Him who is love; and who will not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax. If your child were to say, "I am going to give my life over to your ordering; do all you will," would you begin to make him miserable? Would you not rejoice in the opportunity of arresting him in courses which were harming him? Would you not gladly embrace the opportunity of filling him with joys that he could never have realized for himself? And your heavenly Father will not do less for you; only trust Him with all.

And should there be things in your life which you find it hard to abandon dear as right eye, or hand, or foot; involving the happiness of others as well as your own tell God that you give them over to Him; and that you are willing to have His will done, if He only will bring it to pass in His own good time and way. And if you cannot say as much as that, tell Him that you are willing to be made willing; hand over your will to Him, though it seem to be as a piece of cold, hard iron; sure that He can soften and weld it into the pattern on which He has set His heart.

"Renew my will from day to day;  
Blend it with Thine, and take away  
All that now makes it hard to say,  
Thy will be done."

There is even a more excellent way than any, which is within the reach of the feeblest hand; and that is, to ask the Lord to come into your life to take that which you do not feel able to give. The only matter of which you need be careful, is your willingness that He should have all; if that is assured, the rest may be safely left to His gracious arrangement. Directly you are willing, the door is opened to Him; and He instantly takes full possession.

### III. BE CAREFUL NOT TO THWART GOD'S GOOD WORKMANSHIP

Of course, there is a sense in which we cannot resist or impede the execution of His sovereign will. **"he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth."** And yet, on the other hand, we may hinder and counterwork His loving purposes. **"How often would I . . . but ye would not!"** Let us be on the guard against this disastrous resistance; and be ever on the alert to work out that which God is working in us, **"both to will and to do."**

Once, the prophet Jeremiah (18) was led to go down into the valley, where the potter was at work, molding clay on a wheel. And as he stood by to watch the skilful manipulation of the clay, the prophet had, of course, no idea what pattern was in the designer's mind; though, probably, it was one of the noblest conception, and destined for some royal or special purpose. And so, beneath those rapid revolutions of the wheel, the ideal began to take shape. Then suddenly the clay was taken from the wheel with an exclamation of disappointment, and the design was foiled and spoilt. Why? Because the potter was wanting in skill? No, but because the clay refused to take on the shape which he had designed. His work was, therefore, marred on the wheel; and he was compelled to make of that clay some inferior vessel from that which he had intended. It might have served a noble purpose in the royal household, or even in the Temple service; but it was now fashioned into a coarser form, for some mean purpose in a peasant's home.

The lesson was meant for Israel; but it will serve for us.

Speaking after the manner of men, may we not say that when God created us anew in Christ Jesus He conceived a noble ideal, after the pattern of which we might have been conformed? And if we had only yielded to Him more completely, that ideal would long ago have revealed itself in our experience; but, alas! we have not always been plastic in His hands; we have not obeyed the promptings of His Spirit; we have quenched and grieved Him; and we are far different to-day from what we might have been, and from what God intended us to become. Shall we not confess this with tears and shame? Shall we not take unto us words, and turn to Him, saying,

“Now, O Lord, we are the clay,  
and Thou our potter;  
we are all the work of Thy hands.  
Be not wroth very sore.”

And if a man purify himself from the sins which have hindered the Divine Workman, he shall yet become **“a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master’s use, and prepared unto every good work.”**

I do not deny that God will fulfil His purpose in us, even though we hinder Him; but it will be carried through, as it was in the case of Jacob, at a terrible expenditure of agony, and the shriveling of the sinew of our strength. The yoke will have to be borne, and the long furrows cut; and if the unaccustomed heifer prove restive, its struggles will only chafe sores about its neck but it will ultimately be broken in.

On the whole, therefore, it is always better to take the yoke of Divine purpose, offered by our Lord as His: **“Take My yoke.”** And remember, a yoke is for two. Our Lord yokes Himself at our side; and paces by us, step by step, doing for us what Simon the Cyrenian once did for Him, on the way to Golgotha.

#### **IV. SEEK THE FULNESS OF THE Spirit**

That Spirit dwelt in Israel; as the sun flushes the topmost summits of the Alps with a roseate glow, long before it bathes the valleys in its meridian light. But in this blessed dispensation, He is given not to saints and prophets only; but to all: to sons and daughters; to old men and children; to servants and handmaidens.

**“The promise is to you and to your children; and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call”** (Acts2:39).

And it is only as we receive this sacred gift, in all its fulness, that we can hope to attain to the royal standard of the Israel-life. That blessed Spirit is the Spirit of the Son - the Spirit of the one royal Man that ever walked the world; and if we would have His nature, we must have His Spirit: not in drops, but in rivers; not as a zephyr breath, but as **“a rushing mighty wind.”**

This is the dying need of the Christian Church in this country. We have learning, rhetoric, fashion, wealth, splendid buildings, and superb machinery; but we are powerless; for lack of the power which can only be obtained through the fulness of the Spirit.

Of what use is a train of sumptuous Pullman cars without an engine throbbing with the power of steam? We have too largely forgotten the exhortation: “**Be filled with the Spirit.**” We have thought that the fulness of the Spirit was a specialty for the apostolic age, instead of being for all time. And thus the majority of Christians are living on the other side of Pentecost. We can never be what we might be until we have got back to apostolic theory and practice in respect to this all-essential matter. Oh that God, in these last days, would raise up some fire-touched tongue to do for this neglected doctrine what Luther did for justification by faith!

In the meanwhile seek this blessed filling. It is only possible to emptied hearts; but just so soon as a vacuum has been created by the act of entire surrender, there will be an instantaneous filling by the Holy Ghost in answer to expectant desire and eager faith. For the Holy Ghost longs to enter the human heart; resembling in this the air, which is ever seeking to enter our homes by every keyhole, crack, and aperture. Do not wait to find that you have Him. Be sure that you do possess His fulness, if only you have made room for Him; and go on acting in the strength of His mighty power. So shall you be an Israel, and have power with God and man.

The words, of course, apply only to those who by faith have become the justified children of God. If any who are not assured of this should have read thus far, let them now make a complete abandonment of themselves to the Son of God, to be saved by His death and life, just as He will.

This is the first essential step towards royalty. “**But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name**” (John 1:12).

Life is no child’s play to those who enter into God’s purposes, and in whom He is fulfilling His sublime ideals. But, with the dying Kingsley, we are sure that all is right and well since “all is under law.”

When the discipline is over, we shall be more than satisfied with the result; and, taking our stand amongst the princes of the royal blood, we shall ascribe eternal glory to Him who loved us in spite of all, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and out of Jacobs made us KINGS UNTO GOD.

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