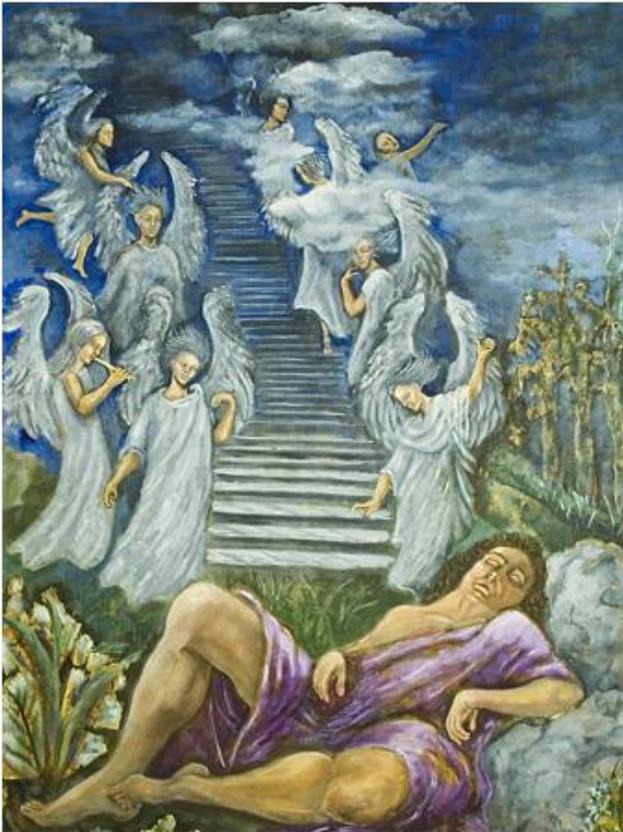


THE JOURNEYS *of*

JACOB

***and* LESSONS *of* DISCIPLINE**



“And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the LORD stood above it ...” **Genesis 28:12**

J. G. Bellett with additions

PREFACE

The life of Jacob is one of very large and varied action, quite of another character from that of his father Isaac. The wisdom of God readily accounts for this; because there is divine intention in the construction of these histories, as there is divine truthfulness in the record of them. By them we are instructed in *mysteries*, as surely as we are made acquainted with *circumstances*. It is my desire to notice these mysteries, as well as to gather the moral of these earliest ages of the human family, and these first fathers of the elect of God.

ELECTION and the call of God in the sovereign exercise of His grace, were exhibited in **Abraham**.

SONSHIP, to which election brings us, (for we are predestinated unto the adoption of children,) was then shown in **Isaac**.

DISCIPLINE, as of a son, (for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?) is now, in its season, to be exhibited in **Jacob**.

And thus, after this manner, these successive histories not only continue the orderly narrative of facts, but present us with a view of that course or conduct which the grace and wisdom of God is taking with His people.

Jacob was a son as well as Isaac. But he was a son at school, or under correction; not a son, like Isaac, in the care and nurture of the home of his father; not as one given to know the rights and dignities of son and heir, but as one made to know the love, the practical love, that chastens and corrects. This was the child Jacob. But we are never to forget that we are never more distinctly children than when under such discipline. Discipline assumes adoption. The exhortation or correction speaks to us as *to children*. The discipline may occupy the foreground, but the fatherly love is the secret.

But this notice of Jacob as a son under discipline I give here only as a general characteristic. As to the materials of his history, various and striking as they are, we may distinguish them into **four eras**:

1. His birth and early life in his father's house in the land of Canaan.
2. His journey to Padan-aram, and his residence there, in the house of Laban the Syrian, for twenty years.

3. His journey back from Padan-aram, and his second residence in Canaan.
4. His journey from Canaan to Egypt, and his residence and death there.

PART I — GENESIS 25; 27 — (Jacob's early life — birth to 77 years)

This is the earliest portion of Jacob's history, his birth, and his life in the house of his father in the land of Canaan till he was about seventy-seven years of age. Abraham had two sons — Isaac and Ishmael and there were by two wives and now there are the two sons of Isaac — Jacob and Esau; but they are by the same wife.

The enmity between the sons of Abraham began when Ishmael, a lad of fourteen years of age, mocked the weaned Isaac but the struggle between the sons of Isaac was in the womb. Two nations were there, as the Lord had told Rebecca, "*Two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels.*"

And so it came to pass. The man of God was found in Jacob, the man of the world in Esau; the principle of *faith* was in the one, the principle of *nature* in the other. Two manner of people were indeed separated from her bowels, and had struggled in her womb. "*The friendship of the world is enmity against God.*"

And this was **Esau**. Accordingly, Esau made the earth the scene of his energies, of his enjoyments, and of his expectations. He was "*a man of the field,*" and "*a cunning hunter.*" He prospered in his generation. He loved the field, and he knew how to use the field. He set his heart on the present life, and knew how to turn its capabilities to the account of his enjoyments. His sons quickly became dukes, nay kings, and had their cities; as Ishmael's children had become princes, and had their castles. Their dignity and their greatness proceeded from themselves; and the world witnessed them in their magnificence.

But **Jacob** was "*a plain man,*" a man of the tent. He took after his fathers. Like Abraham and Isaac, he was a stranger here, sojourning as on the surface of the earth for a season, with his eye upon the promise. His children — while Esau's were dukes, settled in their domains, in the sunshine of their dignities and wealth — had to wander from one nation to

another people, to suffer the hardships and wrongs of injurious Egypt, or to traverse, as pilgrims, the trackless, wasted desert.

Esau was the "*Profane*" one. His hope and his heart were linked with life in this world, and with that only; for he would say, "*I am at the point to die, and what profit shall this birthright do to me?*" Like the Gadarenes, and like Judas, Esau would sell his title to Christ. But Jacob had faith, and was ready to buy what Esau was ready to sell.

Two manner of people were, after this manner, separated from Rebecca's bowels, as all this tells us. They are no sooner brought forth than this is seen; and their earliest habits, their first activities, are characteristic. It was not merely the bondwoman and the free, or the children of the two covenants, as Ishmael and Isaac had been; in Esau and Jacob we get a *fuller* expression of the same natures; the one, that reprobate thing, had from Adam, profane or worldly, which takes a portion in the earth and not in God; the other, that divine thing, had from Christ, which is believing, hopeful, looking to God's provisions, and waiting for the kingdom.

All this survives to the present day, and flourishes abundantly in different samples in the midst of us, or around us.

I might say the Cain, the Nimrod, the Ishmael, and the Esau are still abroad on the earth, and these tales and illustrations have their lessons for our souls. They are wonderful in their simplicity; but they are too deep for the wisdom of the world, and too pure for the love of it.

At the close of **Gen. 26** we read: "*And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite: which were a grief of mind to Isaac and to Rebekah.*"

The command to the nation of Israel at the very beginning was to keep the way of the Lord very particularly as to *marriage*. They were by no means either to give their daughters to the sons of the Canaanites, or take the Canaanites' daughters for their sons. **Deut. 7: 3** If they did so, it would be on the pain of being no longer owned of the Lord. **Joshua 23** According to this, the apostate days of Solomon are marked by disobedience to this very thing (**1 Kings 11**); and afterwards, no real recovery to God could be admitted, without a return to the observance of this principle in their marriages. **Ezra 10; Neh. 10**

Obedience, therefore, in this thing was a peculiar test of the state of the nation. And it is thus that I look at it in this earliest book of Genesis. Though divine law was not then published, divine principles were then understood. It may be regarded as the witness of the state of *family* religion then, as it was of the state of *national* religion afterwards.

Though Isaac had been grieved, as we have seen, by the marriage of Esau with a daughter of the Hittites, yet we learn immediately afterwards, that it is this very same Esau that draws and holds the strongest affections of his father's heart, to which that father would, if he could have sacrificed everything.

Rebecca was a genuine daughter of Abraham. Abraham had crossed the desert at the call of the God of glory, and Rebecca now crosses the same desert at the report of what the God of glory had done for Abraham. They had the like "*spirit of faith.*"

The stronger expression of it we may find in Abraham, but it was the like "*spirit of faith.*" **Abraham** had gone forth in the faith of an unattested call; Rebecca now goes forth on an accredited report. There was no Eshcol brought out of Canaan to Ur to embolden Abraham to take the journey; but "*this is the fruit of it*" was said to Rebecca in the servants and camels and gold and jewels — a branch with a cluster rich and abundant indeed. The report is now sealed to Rebecca as it had not been to Abraham. Abraham followed an untried path; Rebecca did but walk in the footsteps of the flock. But they were on the same road, and reached the same place.

This is simple and beautiful in Rebecca and the way of faith to this hour. But, beloved, there is more, and that, too, of another kind. **Rebecca's character** had been already formed — as, I may say, it is with all of us, before we are quickened of God. The moment of His power arrives — we are made alive with divine life then — the separating call is also answered; but it finds us of a certain character, a certain shape and complexion of mind. It finds us, it may be, Cretans (**Titus 1**), or brothers and sisters of Laban, or something that wears the strong stamp of a peculiar pravity of nature. And then character and mind, derived from nature or from family or from education and the like, we take with us after we have been born of the Spirit, and carry it in us across the desert from Padan-aram to the house of Abraham. This is serious. It is serious, that with the quickening of the

Spirit, nature, or the force of early habits and education, or of family character, will cling to us still. "*The Cretans are always liars.*"

Laban, with whom Rebecca had grown up, was a crafty, knowing, worldly man. It is plain that, on the occasion of Eliezer's visit, he had been moved only by the *gifts*. They made a ready way for Abraham's servant; as we read, "*A man's gift maketh room for him.*" **Proverbs 18: 16**

Laban was evidently the stirring, active, important one in his father Bethuel's house. He had a taste for occasions which called for management. And all this is a very bad symptom. It is a bad symptom when one carries the bag. It is bad to find one prematurely managing and clever, or, at any period, fond of occasions where skill of that kind is to be exercised, having an aptness in conducting either state affairs or family interests. And just such an one was Laban; and Laban was the brother of Rebecca and Rebecca had passed all her life, till her marriage, with him; and the family character, in this only great action in which she is called to take a part, sadly betrays itself.

If Abraham and Sarah had brought the foul, unclean compact between them, as they left their father's house to walk with God, so did Rebecca bring this family character, this Laban-leaven, with her.

We have *nature* in its pravity with us after our conversion; and we have our own *fleshly characteristics* also, as well as the *common* pravity of nature. And we have to rebuke them sharply, that we may be sound, that is, morally healthful, in the faith. **Titus 1: 13** And this lesson is afresh pressed upon us, from the story of this distinguished woman, Rebecca, in this chapter.

But there is more of the same kind. **Jacob**, as well as his mother, Rebecca got his mind formed by this same earliest influence. He was all his days — I mean, all his practical, active days — a slow-hearted, calculating man; and in this family scene, in **Gen. 27**, we find him to be such an one — a ready, intelligent pupil of his mother, Laban's sister, and whose favourite child he had been from his birth. So that as Laban had been corrupting his sister Rebecca. Rebecca had been corrupting her son Jacob.

And further still, as this same chapter tells us, **Isaac** whose mind and character, as we have seen, had been so remarkably formed by his early life in Sarah's tent, had sunk into the indulgence of some of the low desires of

nature. He loved his son Esau, because he ate of his venison. This was poor indeed, and something worse than poor. And this love of venison, we may surely suggest, must have encouraged Esau in the chase; just as Rebecca's cleverness, got and brought from her brother's house in Padan, formed the mind and character of her favourite Jacob. And thus one parent was helping to corrupt one of the children, and the other the other.

What mischief, what sad defilement, is disclosed here, in all this family scene! But we may go on to expose it even more for the heart is not only capable of such defilement, but it is daring enough, at times, to take its naughtiness *into the sanctuary*. "*I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly.*" **Proverbs 5**

The word to Aaron, long after this, was, '*Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy son with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation.*' **Lev. 10**. Nature is not to be animated in order to wait on the service of God; it is not to be set in action by its provisions, for the discharge of the duties of the sanctuary. Strong drink may exhilarate, and give ebullition to animal spirits, but this is no qualification for a priest of the house of God.

But even into pollution such as this Isaac seems to have been betrayed. "*Take, I pray thee,*" says he to Esau, "*thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go to the field, and take me some venison: and make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die.*" He was going to do the last religious act of a patriarchal priest, and he calls as for wine and strong drink, the food of mere animal life, to raise and endow him for the service!

This was sad indeed, thus to deliberate on the venison at such a moment. We may all be conscious how much of nature soils our holy things, how much of the mere animation of the flesh may be mistaken for the easy and strong current of the Spirit. We may be aware of this, in the place of communion. And this is to be our sorrow and our humbling — we are to confess it as evil, or at least as weakness, and to watch against it. But to prepare for it, carefully to mix the wine and strong drink, to take a full draught, after this manner, this exceeds in defilement.

And nothing comes of all this but dishonour and loss. The whole of this family pollution is judged in the holiness of God, because this was a family

of God in the earth. "*You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.*"

Isaac is laid aside, Rebecca never sees Jacob again, and the calculating supplanter finds himself in the midst of toils and wrongs and hardships, supplanted and deceived himself again and again; for twenty long years an alien from the house of his father. Nothing comes of all this, whether we look at the crooked policy of the one party, or at the fleshly favouritism of the other; all is disappointment and shame, under the rebuke of the holiness of the Lord.

There is, however, one relief, and it is a very important one, in the midst of this otherwise foul and gloomy scene. "*By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.*" This is the Holy Ghost's own reference to this chapter in **Hebrews 11**.

But ere I speak of the relief or comfort which this has for us when thinking of Isaac, I take occasion to inquire, what was the nature or character of this blessing by the patriarchs upon their children, which we find again and again in the Book of Genesis?

If I mistake not, some of the secrets of patriarchal religion, patriarchal worship and ministry, are involved in the answer to this. Religion had, in these earliest days, the same great truths which it still has for its spirit and principle.

The *Fall* and *Recovery* of man, or *Ruin* and *Redemption*, were then made known, and they were received by faith. The *altars* of the fathers, and the ordinance of *clean* and *unclean*, tell us of faith and of the apprehensions of faith in those days. The *tent* of the living patriarchs, and the *Machpelah* of the departed patriarchs, tell us that they understood *the stranger's calling*, and a *coming resurrection*; and Abraham's grove at Beersheba (**Gen. 21**), and his alliance with the Gentile at the well of the oath, Beersheba, tell us likewise, in clear though symbolic language, that they understood some of the bright and happy secrets of the millennial age, or of "*the world to come.*"

And *worship* and *ministry*, in those infant days, were in their simplest forms. I may say, *nature* suggested that the father or head of the house should be the prophet, priest, and king, there. In after times, when the condition of things spread out, and when, with enlargement and age, corruption came in, *the*

holiness of God demanded a separated or circumcised people; and, connected with such, a separated or anointed priesthood.

Now, in our day, in the day of the kingdom of God, which is, as we know, "*not in word, but in power*," it is required that ministry should be something more than nature would suggest, or than holiness would demand; there must be *power*, such as the Spirit Himself prepares and imparts. But in the early days of Genesis, those *family* days — those infant, earliest days — the voice of *nature* was listened to, and duly and seasonably so; and accordingly, the head of the family was the minister of God to the family, and both the dignities and the services of prophets, priests, and kings, within the range of the homestead, or in the family temple, centred in the father.

The blessing of the children seems to flow from this. It was an act performed in the combined virtues of a prophet and a priest, which, as we see, the fathers of the families carried in their own persons. They received a communication of the divine mind, and then uttered it, as "*oracles of God*;" and, being separated or priestly representatives of God to their children, they pronounced His blessing, God's blessing, upon them.

They seem to sustain this character through the Book of Genesis.

As to **Jacob's** part in this family scene which we are looking at, we may certainly say, had he but left his matters in the Lord's hand, where they had been from the beginning, from before his birth, and not allowed his mother to take them into hers, he would have fared far better. How often has many and many a Jacob since the days of **Gen. 27** proved the same!

The Lord had promised him the blessing without any condition. "*The elder shall serve the younger*." But he could not, in the patience of faith, wait the Lord's time and method to make good His own promise. Therefore the promise gets laden with reserves and difficulties and burdens. It shall surely be made good. The promise of the Lord is certain, and "*never was forfeited yet*."

He is able to make it stand. The elder shall serve the younger — but now, by reason of Jacob's own unbelief and policy, the elder shall give the younger some trouble: because the younger thinks well to deal with the promise in his own craft and skill, he shall be made to reach it after delay and sorrow and shame.

Accordingly, Esau himself gets a promise from the Lord, through his father Isaac on this occasion, a promise which the divine purpose and grace towards Jacob, at the first, had never contemplated. "*And Isaac his father answered and said unto him, Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; and by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.*" **vv. 39, 40.**

And yet — such is the fruitfulness and instruction of the testimonies of God — there are others, in Scripture, of other generations, who have still more solemn lessons and warnings for us. It is humbling to be *laid aside* as no longer fit for use; but it is sad to be left merely to *recover ourselves*, and it is terrible to remain to *defile ourselves*.

And illustrations of all this moral variety we get in the testimonies of God. *Jacob*, in his closing days in Egypt, is not as a vessel laid aside, but he is there recovering himself. I know there are some truly precious things connected with him during those seventeen years that he spent in that land, and we could not spare the lesson which the Spirit reads to us out of the life of Jacob in Egypt. But still, the moral of it is this — a saint, who had been under holy discipline, recovering himself, and yielding fruit meet for recovery. And when we think of it a little, that is but a poor thing. But Solomon is a still worse case. He lives to defile himself; sad and terrible to tell it. This was neither Isaac nor Jacob — it was not a saint simply laid aside, nor a saint left to recover himself. Isaac was, in the great moral sense, blameless to the end, and Jacob's last days were his best days; but of Solomon we read, "*It came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods,*" and this has made the writing over his name, the tablet to his memory, equivocal, and hard to be deciphered to this day.

Such lessons do **Isaac** and **Jacob** and **Solomon**, in these ways, read for us, beloved — such are the minute and various instructions left for our souls in the fruitful and living pages of the oracles of God. They give us to see, in the house of God, *vessels fit for use* and *kept in use* even to the end — **vessels laid aside, to rust out rather than to wear out (Isaac)** — **vessels whose best service it is to get themselves clean again (Jacob)** — and **vessels whose dishonour it is, at the end of their service, to contract some fresh defilement (Solomon).**

Wondrous and various the lessons and the ways of grace, abounding grace! Quickly indeed does the soul entertain thoughts of God according to the suggestions of *nature* instead of knowing Him according to *faith*. Nature holds Him before the soul as a judge, or as a lawgiver, or an exactor of righteousness, as One that carries balances in His hand to try every thought and work — One that is sensitive and resentful of the slightest touch of evil. But faith holds Him before a gazing, worshipping eye and heart, as the One who always loves us, do what He may, or speak as He will for faith worketh by love (**Gal. 5: 6**) — it worketh towards God as Love, and therefore it is a spirit of confidence and liberty. If we find our souls under pressure of the spirit of fear or bondage or uncertainty, we may be sure that they have let go the gentle hand of faith, and allowed themselves to be led by such tutors and governors as nature provides. This ought not so to be. We are to know that we have *ever* to do with *love!* When we read, when we pray, when we converse, when we confess, when, we serve, when we sing, when we look at His hand in providence, or think of His name in secret, may faith's communion with God be ours! He loves us. The relationship in which we stand, and of which our Isaac was the expression, makes this a *necessary* truth.

It is "*to Himself*" that God has brought us and adopted us — having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ *to Himself*, according to the good pleasure of His will. **Eph. 1: 5**. And these words "*to Himself*" bespeak God's own joy in the *adoption* of the elect, in making them *children*; as was Abraham's joy at the weaning of our Isaac. Christ presents the Church to *Himself* (**Eph. 5: 27**), and the Father gathers the elect as children by adoption to *Himself*. Each has personal interest and personal delight in the mysteries of grace.

And according to this, the Holy Ghost, in the Epistle to the **Galatians**, to which the story of Isaac so refers, pleads the cause of the Father as well as the cause of Christ with us. He teaches us that we are redeemed by Christ from the *curse* of the law, and, through the Spirit given to us by the Father, from the *bondage* of the law. All this is full of blessing to us; and all this, the mystery of Isaac the son of the free-woman, suggests to us.

Faith is that principle in us which gives to the Lord Jesus the place or privilege (such a place indeed as God alone can fill) of sustaining the confidence of a sinner entirely by Himself, of being the immediate, the only

object of the sinner's trust. But faith, in this dispensation, involves *relationship*. By faith we stand *in* the Person as well as *on* the work of Christ — and Christ being the Son, we are children, as we are saved sinners. We are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus **Gal. 3: 26**.

And Ishmael is not to share the house with Isaac; the spirit of bondage gendered by the law or by the religion of ordinances, is to be put out, and the spirit of liberty alone is to fill it.

For the house is now set in a child and not in a servant, in Isaac and not in Eliezer — and *relationship is* God's joy as it is ours.

"The Father seeketh such to worship Him."

Wondrous words of abounding grace, beloved and joy in our Isaac pledged this in patriarchal days!

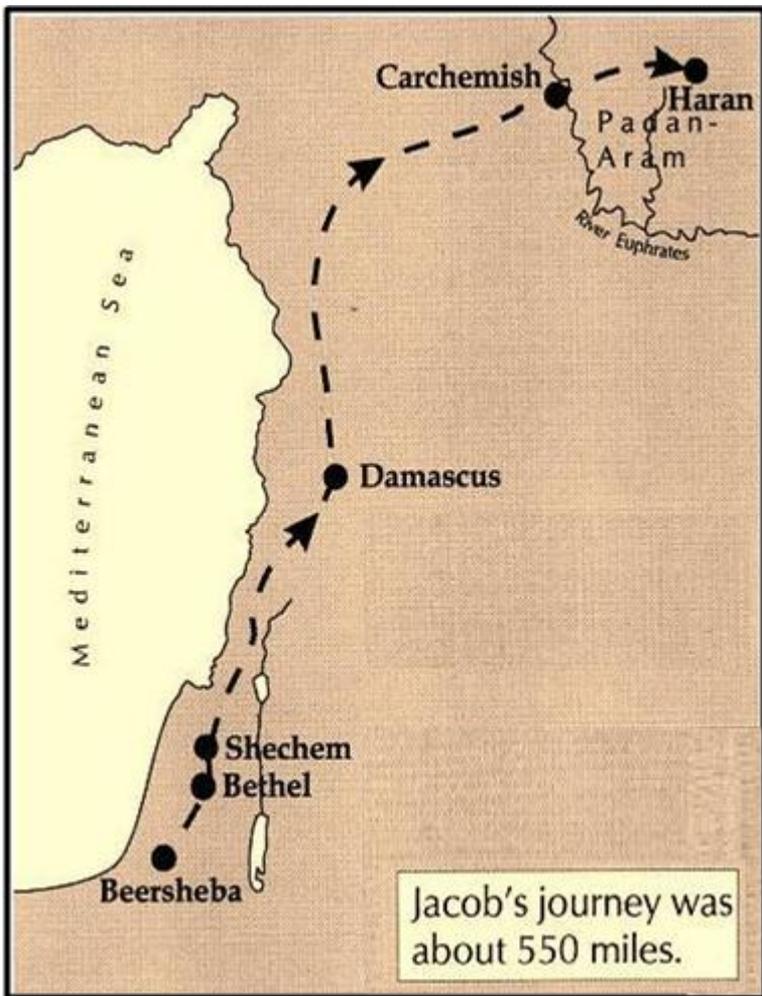
Summarizing this first section we see that the history of Jacob is the history of one in the favour of God, but disciplined in a failing walk, and through failure, the faithfulness of God being evidenced throughout all his failures and wanderings in his attempts to bring about the blessing in a carnal way.

The results of God's disciplinary work is seen in his interview with Pharaoh (**Gen. 47**) where he goes into the presence of the great potentate of the world, and, without any hesitation, blesses him, whilst at the same time giving a very sorrowful history of his own life. There is most evident superiority in the presence of the world; but, putting himself in comparison with other saints, his own life has been a sad one - *few and evil* his days.

The moment a saint is put in contrast with the highest potentate in the world, he is the superior. It is very lovely to see this lowliness, the result of his "*few and evil*" days.

The saint may have to confess before the world, to his own shame, yet there cannot but be, where the soul is in communion with God, the consciousness of blessing.

Beersheba to Haran



| JACOB'S AGE | CITY | VERSES |
|-------------|-----------|----------------|
| 77 | Beersheba | Gen. 28:10 |
| 78 | Bethel | Gen 28:11-22 |
| 80 | Haran | Gen 29:4-31:16 |

PART 2 — GENESIS 28-30 — (Journey to and 20 years stay in Haran) — age 78-100 years

Jacob begins to be seen under discipline in **chap. 28**, and there it is where this second part of his history opens, and where also, in the Book of Genesis, he becomes the chief or leading character.

In his journey out towards Padan, but ere he left the borders of Canaan, at the place called **Luz (Bethel)**, the Lord meets him. This was not his father's bed-side, where he was sinning, but a lonely, dreary, distant spot where his sin had cast him, and where the discipline of his heavenly Father was dealing with him. In such a place God can meet us. He cannot appear to us in the scene of our iniquities, but He can in the place of His correction. And such was Luz to Jacob. It was a comfortless spot. The stones of the place were his pillow, and the sky over his head his covering; and he had no friend but his staff to accompany and cheer him. But the God of his fathers comes there to him. He does not alter his present circumstances or reverse the chastening. He lets him still pursue his way unfriended, to find, at the end of it, twenty years' hard service at the hand of a stranger, with many a wrong and injury. But he gives him heavenly pledges that hosts on high should watch and wait around him.

The Lord had made, as we know, great promises to Abraham: the same were repeated to Isaac and are now, at Bethel, given to Jacob. But, to Jacob, something very distinct from these common promises is added: "*And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.*" **v. 15.**

This was a new promise, an added mercy; just because Jacob needed it, as Abraham and Isaac had not. Jacob was the only one of the three who needed that the Lord would be with him wherever he went, and bring him home again. Jacob, by his own naughtiness, had made this additional mercy necessary to himself, and, in abounding grace, he gets it and the vision of the ladder pledges it. The promises to Abraham and to Isaac had not included this providential, angelic care. They had remained in the land; but Jacob had made himself an exile, that needed the care and watching of a special oversight from heaven, and he gets it. And it is to this, I believe, that Jacob alludes, when he says to Joseph, "*The blessings of thy father have prevailed*

above the blessings of my progenitors." **Chap. 49: 26** This angelic care that watched over him, under direct commission from heaven, in his days of exile and drudgery, which his own error had incurred, *distinguished* him as an object of mercy, and gave him "*blessings*" above those of his "*progenitors.*" And in this character he reached "*the bounds of the everlasting hills.*"

He was heir of the kingdom as a *debtor to special mercy*, through that abounding grace that had helped him and kept him amid the bitter fruits of his own naughtiness. As David, in his day, triumphed in "the everlasting covenant" made with him, though for the present his house was in ruins through his own sin. **2 Samuel 23**

This is God's way, excellent and perfect in the combination of grace and holiness. And upon this, let me observe, that in all circumstances there are two objects, and that nature eyes the one, and faith the other. Thus, in divine discipline, such as Jacob was now experiencing, there is the *rod*, and also the *hand that is using it*. Nature regards the first, faith recognizes the second.

Job, in his day, broke down under the rod, because he concerned himself with it alone. Had he eyed the counsel, the heart, or the hand that was appointing it (as we are exhorted to do, **Micah 6: 9**), he would have stood. But nature prevailed in him, and he kept his eye upon the rod, and it was too much for him.

So in *failures*, as well as in circumstances, there are two objects. Conscience has its object, and faith again has its object. But conscience is not to be allowed to rob faith of its treasures, the treasures of restoring, pardoning grace, which the love of God in Christ has stored up for it.

There is great comfort in this. Nature is not to be over-busy with circumstances, nor conscience with failures. Nature is to feel that no affliction is for the present joyous, and conscience or heart may be broken; but in either case, faith is to be at its post and do its duty; and much of the gracious energy of the Spirit in the epistles is engaged in putting faith at its post, and encouraging it to do its duty.

The Apostles, under the Holy Ghost, take knowledge of the danger and temptation we are under by nature; and while it is abundantly enforced, that

conscience is to be quick and jealous, yet it is required that faith shall maintain itself in the very face of it.

To know God *in grace* is His praise and our joy. We naturally, or according to the instincts of a tainted nature, think of Him as one that *exacts obedience* and *looks for service*. But faith knows Him as one that *communicates*, that speaks to us of privileges, of the liberty and the blessing of our relationship to Him.

But Jacob's soul was not quite up to this way of grace. He found the place where the ladder and the angels were seen, and where the God of his fathers spoke to him, to be "*dreadful*."

In some sense it was too much for him, just as it was long afterwards with Peter on the holy hill. God is true to the aboundings of His grace. Jacob may say, "*How dreadful is this place!*" Peter and his companions may have their fear; but the ladder, nevertheless, reaches to heaven, and angels are up and down upon it in the sight of the patriarch; and the glory on the Mount still shines. For the grace of God is richer than the apprehensions of the soul about it. God shines in Himself above our experiences. And it is in Himself He is to be known, and not in the reflections of our experience.

Still, like Peter on the hill, Jacob, in some sense, found it good to be at Luz, and he called the place **Bethel**. It was the house of God to him, for God had there been with him, and spoken to him; it was the gate of heaven in his eye, for there the angels had appeared, as descending from their own place on high. "*This is none other but the house of God,*" says he, and this is the gate of heaven."

God both *records* His name and *glorifies* it. He records it or reveals it at first, and faith accepts Him. In due time He verifies that record or testimony making it all good, and thus glorifies His name.

And wherever He records His name there is His house. Ornan's threshing-floor got the same dignity long afterwards, which Luz now gets, and on the same title. "*This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of burnt-offering for Israel,*" says David of that spot of the Jebusite. **1 Chr. 22: 1**

For it was the place like this Bethel of our patriarch, where mercy had rejoiced against judgment and where God was revealing Himself in the aboundings of His grace and there, faith descries the house of God.

Jacob and David, each in his day, were saints under discipline; but the Lord met them in the rich provisions of His love, thus revealing Himself or recording His name; and this was His house to them. But it is easier thus to consecrate the house, than to learn the lesson that is taught there. Jacob rightly uttered his heart under force of the impressions which the vision could not but awaken; but there is something of old Jacob in his spirit still. The faulty way of his heart is at work still, and he seems to calculate, and to make bargains, and to enter into conditions, though the Lord had spoken to him there in the language of the promise, in free, sovereign, abounding goodness. For nature still stirs itself after many a rebuke and defeat, and outlives what for a moment may have appeared a death-blow. Jacob no more now leaves it behind him at Bethel, than before he had left it behind him in his mother's tent.

But he goes on. Grace sets the chastened saint on his journey, and with some alacrity too, till "*he came to the land of the people of the east,*" till he reached Padan-aram, where his mother's counsel had appointed him, and, doubtless, where the hand of God had now conducted him.

His introduction to Rachel was at the well, and in the midst of the flock, like that of Eliezer to Rebecca; and Eliezer was but Isaac's representative. But Jacob was the poor man, Isaac the wealthy. Isaac could enrich Rebecca with earrings and bracelets of gold, pledges of the goodly estate he had for her. Jacob has but his toil and sweat of face. The one was as the son and heir, the other a man who had beggared himself, and must find his own way through the wear and tear of life as best he may, with God's help. Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep. **Hosea 12: 12** And a hard service he was about to find it. But he enters on it at once, and continues at it for twenty long years. **Gen. 29 - 31**

The scene is laid in the house of Laban his mother's brother, and a scene of various moral actions it quickly becomes, and so continues. We have not only Jacob himself and Laban, but the two wives Leah and Rachel, and their two handmaids: Zilpah and Bilhah.

Jacob had been but a little while under the trials and sorrows of his sojourn with Laban, ere he was visited after the very pattern of his own offence at home. He had deceived his father touching his brother and the blessing. Laban now deceives him touching Rachel and the marriage. But in much of

his behaviour during the twenty years he spent with Laban, we see what was excellent in him.

For the force and influence of knowing *that we are under the hand of God for correction*, is necessarily felt by a mind that has anything right towards God in it. It is not that nature will be changed or broken under such a pressure, but it must, in measure, more or less, be controlled.

David when under rebuke, sore and humbling as ever saint had exposed himself to, carries himself beautifully. His words to Ittai, to Zadok, and to Hushai, his resentment of the motion of the sons of Zeruah, his humiliations, his lamentations over Absalom, and his using his victory as if it had been a defeat, all this and more than this of the same kind, show us a blessed work of the Spirit in his soul.

In Jacob at Padan-aram we get nothing so fine as this, I know; but, if I mistake not, we get a saint under discipline conscious of the discipline, well understanding the character of the moment under God's hand, and the righteousness of the rebuke of the Lord, carrying himself meekly and watchfully. He submits to the wrongs of an injurious master in silence. He serves patiently, and suffers without complaint. His wages were changed ten times, but he answers not again. In all this he is humbled under the mighty hand of God, as one who would fain remember his own past ways. And at the end of twenty years' hard drudgery and ill usage, he is able to testify of his fidelity, and God Himself seems to seal the testimony. By the providences of His hand, and the revelations in visitations of His Spirit, and also by direct interferences with Laban himself, the Lord shelters and blesses and vindicates Jacob.

There is beauty in this! I say not that nature was mortified, that the root of bitterness was judged. We shall find, I know, that after this, Jacob is old Jacob still, sadly betrayed by the same leaven that had been working in him from the beginning. But, while in the house of the Syrian, Jacob was as one who knew himself to be under the mighty hand of God as for correction, and carried himself accordingly, neither justifying himself against reproaches, nor contending for his rights in the face of wrongs and injustice.

Such a one I judge Jacob to have been in the house of Laban. As to Laban, he was a thorough man of the world when Jacob entered his house, and so

he was when Jacob left it. In all his dealings, from first to last, he eyes his own advantage. He is constrained to own that the hand of God was with Jacob; but he would make that hand, through Jacob, minister to himself, and turn Jacob's interest in God to his own account. For twenty years he had the witness of the hand of the Lord, and the operation of His grace and power, under his eye and in his house, and that daily; but he continued a man of the world still. God came near to him, as afterwards to Bethsaida and Chorazin in the doing of His mighty works; but there was no repentance. And Jacob's departure from his house at the last was like an escape out of the enemy's hand, or from the snare of the fowler. It was a kind of exodus. In a family way it was what was afterwards known by Israel in a national way.

Laban was as Pharaoh and Padan-aram as Egypt to our patriarch. He would fain have kept Jacob a drudge still, or at best have sent him away as a beggar; but the Lord pleaded for Jacob with Laban, as He afterwards pleaded for Israel with Pharaoh. Laban and Pharaoh had each in his day *witnessed* the operation of God, but neither of them became the *subject* of it.

A thorough lover of the world he surely was, and never anything better; a crafty one, and a hypocritical one too — common companions. At the end, when all his devices are broken to pieces, and no enchantment is allowed to prosper, as against Israel, he does what he can, according to the miserable, disgusting style of a crafty heart, to cover the purpose which had now failed, and to give himself a fair character. He pretends that Jacob's leaving him was mere fondness for home, while his conscience must have told him many a very different reason. He affects grief and indignation at not having an opportunity of kissing his daughters and grandchildren, and of sending them away honourably, while his conscience must have reminded him how he had sold them again and again. He seems to be concerned for them, now about to be in Jacob's hand, as if his own hand had been that of a father to them. He pretends to spare Jacob through religious fear of God's words, while he must have felt himself to be completely restrained by God, willing or unwilling, religious or profane; as Balaam afterwards. And he gives a serious air to the last bargain between him and Jacob, introducing the name of the God of Abraham, though he had just been searching for his idols, and was preparing to return to that land out of which God had called Abraham, and to continue there a thorough, heartless man of the world

still, a worshipper of his own god, miserable man, pointing a holy, serious lesson for us.

But we have the women and the children of Padan-aram, as well as Laban the Syrian.

The women and the children of the Book of Genesis are all mysteries. We see this in Eve and her three children — in Abraham's Sarah, and Abraham's Hagar, and Abraham's Keturah, and the seed of each of them. And we noticed in Isaac the same mystic character in Rebecca; his wife, and Esau and Jacob his children. Each and all tell out parts and parcels of the purpose of God, as in figures. And now, in the women which become connected with Jacob in Padan, whether it be his wife the elder sister, or his wife the younger sister, or the handmaids given to them, and in the children of each of them, there are mysteries again.

In the children of Israel, that is, the nation, the seed of Abraham, we find three classes:

1. There has already been Israel *after the flesh*, set in the land under title of their fleshly alliance with Abraham.
2. There is now, at this time, the nation *in bondage*, made to know the service of the Gentiles.
3. There will be, by-and-by, the nation *set in grace*, Israel redeemed and accepted, established in the promises made to the fathers.

These are three generations in the nation of Israel, as that nation either has been, now is, or is to be hereafter. And the shadowing of this, I judge, we see in the families of Jacob in Padan; that is, in the children of Leah, who had her title in the flesh; in the children of the handmaids; and in the children of Rachel the beloved, who had no strength in nature, but whose seed was all of promise or of God.

The way of the wisdom of God is thus learnt in the women and children here, in **Gen. 29 - 31**, as it had been in the earlier family scenes of this wondrous book.

As soon as Joseph, the child of promise, the son of Rachel the beloved, is given to him, Jacob speaks of leaving Padan, the place of his exile and bondage. See **Gen. 30: 25, 26**. And this, simple as it seems to be, has

character in it. The condition of an alien and servant did not suit him, as soon as he got the seed that witnessed to him the power of God in his behalf. He may have felt somewhat instinctively, that it became him now to assert his freedom, and to bethink himself of his home and his inheritance.

I say not whether Jacob really entered into this, or whether it was something of an inspiration that he breathed, and which, in its full meaning, was beyond him. But so it was that he said to Laban, immediately upon the birth of Joseph, "*Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my country.*"

It had been very much after this manner with Abraham in an earlier day. As soon as Isaac was weaned, the scene around Abraham immediately changed. The child of the bondwoman has to leave the house, and Abraham takes precedence of the Gentile. See **Gen. 21**

The weaning of Isaac was the turning-point in Abraham's condition. In spirit, for a moment, he enters the kingdom, raising a new altar, an altar to the "*everlasting God,*" and planting a grove. This was very fine, and the character of it. But so was it now with Jacob, as then with Abraham. As soon as Joseph, the child of promise, that witnessed the grace and strength of God, is given to him he conceives the thought of freedom and of home.

This was a fine, striking instance of the intelligence of a new mind in Jacob. The way of faith, I may add, is seen in Rachel on the same occasion, for she calls her son "**Joseph,**" that is, "*adding*" assured that the Lord, who had now *begun* His mercies towards her, would go *on* with them and *perfect* them.

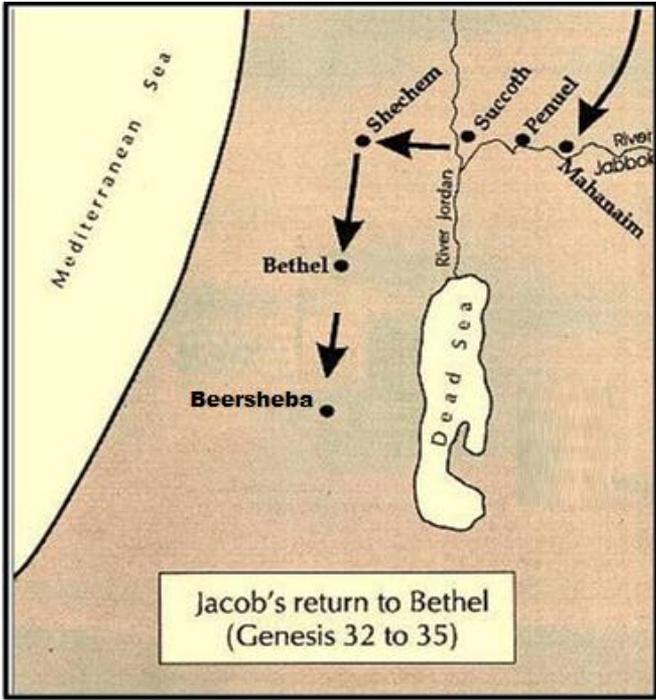
As faith now in our hearts and on our lips, in like spirit, says, "*He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*"

From His gifts, Rachel not only "*drew a plea to ask Him still for more,*" but in still bolder, happier faith, drew a conclusion to *trust* Him still for more.

But though this was so, the connection between Laban and Jacob is continued for a while after Joseph's birth, till the separation takes place under force of other circumstances altogether, leaving Laban, still more than before, a kind of pillar of salt, or a solemn remembrance to us of what our wretched hearts are capable.

**PART 3 — GENESIS 31-35 (His journey home and stay in Canaan)
age 100-130 years**

HARAN TO BEERSHEBA



| | AGE | CITY | VERSES |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------------|----------------|
| Journey home took 5 years | 100 | HARAN | GEN 31:17-55 |
| | 101 | MAHANAIM | GEN 32:1-23 |
| | 105 | PENUEL | GEN 32:24-32 |
| | 105 | SUCCOTH | GEN 33:16-17 |
| | 105 | SHECHEM | GEN 34:1-31 |
| | 105 | BETHEL | GEN 35:6-15 |
| Spent about 25 yrs in Canaan | 105 | BEERSHEBA | GEN 35:16-29 |
| Spent 17 yrs in Egypt (Goshen) | 130 | GOSHEN | GEN 46:28-50:6 |
| | 147 | BEERSHEBA | GEN 50:7-13 |

The time of his servitude closes in **Gen. 31**. He is then on his way back from Padan-aram to Canaan; the principal scenes of his journey being at *Mount Gilead*, shortly after his setting out, and *Mahanaim*, near the brook Jabbok, a little before he entered the land.

It was at Mount Gilead that the parting between him and Laban took place, for Laban had pursued him so far. But there they make a covenant, offering sacrifice, and then eating together as upon the sacrifice.

Such a scene, in mystery, exhibits our blessing. For we enjoy a covenant of peace, secured by a sacrifice, and witnessed by a feast. So, in the night of redemption from Egypt, the altar and the table, that is, the sacrifice and the feast, are there again. The blood is upon the door-post, and the household, thus ransomed and sheltered, are within, feeding on the lamb, whose blood was protecting and delivering them.

But there is another thing on this occasion to be noticed — it is *Jacob who offers the sacrifice*.

This has a great character in it. It tells us that Jacob knew his place and dignity under God. Laban had all the claims which nature or the flesh or relationship could confer, but Jacob acts in spite of them. Laban was the elder; he was the master and the father-in-law. But still Jacob takes the place of the "better," and offers the sacrifice, in the like spirit of faith as Abraham when entering into covenant with the king of Gerar (**Gen. 21**); or like Jethro at Horeb, in the midst of the Israel of God, and in the presence of Aaron. **Ex. 18**

Such cases are among the triumphs of faith; and they are no mean triumphs either. To know our high title in Christ, and by no means to surrender it, even when circumstances may humble us, this is no easy thing. Jacob was under discipline in Padan-aram. He had no altar there. Before God he was rather a penitent than a worshipper. But before Laban he knows himself as a saint, and here, at the Mount Gilead, he has his pillar, his sacrifice, and his feast, and he exercises that faith which emboldens him to act according to his dignity as a saint and priest of God, in the presence of all the claims of flesh and blood. Elihu, in the book of Job, though renouncing *himself* before his elders, asserts the title of *the Spirit in him*, in the face of the highest claims of nature.

It is very encouraging to witness such fragments of the mind of Christ in the saints. Jacob never suspected his title in Christ, from first to last, though under discipline all his days. And this is blessed — blessed to take the place that grace, in its riches, in its exceeding riches, in its glory and in its aboundings, gives us.

I do not believe, if Peter in **John 21** had purposed to reach the Lord as a *penitent*, he would have *hurried towards* him as he did. A penitent would have approached with a more measured step. But Peter was not thinking of his late denial of his Lord, but of his Lord Himself. His step was therefore hurried and earliest. He had sinned against his Master, it is indeed true, and might have been backward and ashamed. But, wondrous to say it, as Peter *the penitent* would not have taken so ready and so earnest a journey, so Peter the penitent would not, at the end of it, have been so welcome to his Master, as the confiding though erring Peter. In this is the grace and heart of Him "with whom is *all* our business now."

However these are but fragments however, broken pillars, in the temples of God. Nature is nature still; and Jacob, quickly after all this, betrays himself as *old* Jacob still.

One has said that had the Lord slacked His hand with Job, when the *first* trial was over, Job would have come short of the blessing. There was respite; and it might have been thought that all had ended. But God's end in grace was not yet reached; and we may be sure that Satan's malice was not yet satisfied. The unwearied adversary begins afresh, the Lord gives him place again, and Job is visited a *second* time.

And nature is just as unwearied as Satan. Expel it and it will return. We have just had this little respite from the way of nature, in Jacob at Mount Gilead, and seen for a moment the better mind in him, and some expressions of the glory, but we are quickly, too quickly indeed, to see the old man again.

Jacob goes on his way from Mount Gilead, and as he approaches the borders of the land, the angels of God meet him. Jacob at once recognizes them. "*This is God's host,*" says he, and he called the place **Mahanaim**.

This was holy ground. The undertakings of **Gen. 28** had been fulfilled — the pledges of Bethel had been redeemed.

Accordingly, we have no ladder here. Providential, angelic guardianship had fulfilled its ministry; Jacob had been kept in the distant land, and brought home to his own land. The ladder may, therefore, be taken down; and instead of angels ascending and descending as between heaven and the patriarch, angels *meet* him. They are standing before him, just to salute him, or to welcome him on his return. The Lord God of his fathers and of the promises was welcoming our patriarch home, and ministers of the heavenly courts were sent to express the mind of their King towards him.

This was "*piping*" to Jacob, and Jacob ought to have "*danced*." He should have breathed an exulting spirit. He should have been already in triumph, ere the battle was fought, or even the armies were arrayed. He should have entered the field with songs, like Jehoshaphat. If the hosts of heaven thus waited on him, what had he to fear from the hosts of Esau?

"*If God be for us, who can be against us?*" But this was not so with him. He "*laments*," rather than dances, at this piping. He trembles, and prays, and calculates. He marshals his force, as though the battle were his. This is all *religious*, but it is all *unbelief* too; and all this the Lord resents. Surely He does. It was all out of harmony in His ear. He had welcomed Jacob home with every token of an earnest, honourable welcome, but Jacob was out of spirits.

The Lord seeks to be *one* with us, and that we be one with Him; so that discordance of soul can never suit Him. He withstands Jacob. "*There wrestled a man with him,*" as we read, "*till the breaking of the day.*"

This was God's answer to his prayer. And this is all very significant, and it has lessons for us.

It is found by us much easier to trust the Lord in all questions that arise between Him and ourselves, than it is to bring Him in, and use Him, and trust Him, in questions that arise between us and others — easier to trust Him for eternity than for tomorrow; because eternity is entirely in His hand. Tomorrow, as we judge, is more or less divided between Him and others — in the power of circumstances as well as of God.

Abraham, in his day, betrayed this. He came forth at the bidding of the God of glory, leaving country, kindred, and father's house; but as soon as a

famine came, his faith failed, and instead of trusting the Lord in the face of circumstances, he goes down to Egypt.

Jacob, at Mahanaim betrays the same easy, common way of nature. He is unable to trust God in the face of Esau. Esau's 400 men frighten him, and he will interpose, first, his messengers with words of peace and friendliness, and then, his presents, that by one or the other he may allay the heat of his brother's anger. He has no faith in God, so as to bring Him in between himself and Esau. He trembles, and prays, and calculates, and marshals his household. Circumstances have proved too much for him. But immediately afterwards, when the Lord Himself withstands him, when it becomes a question between him and God, then he is bold and prevails. He faints not, though rebuked, and rebuked sharply, by the Lord. He behaves himself like a champion of faith, and obtains a good report. He carries himself like a prince, and gains new honours. This is a common experience, and this moment in Jacob's history at the brook Jabbok expresses it.

There is not, however, necessarily, in such a victory as this, a cure for that faint-heartedness that had occasioned the previous conflict. And Jacob is now about to illustrate this for our further admonition. In the very next chapter (**Gen. 33**), which is but the continuance of the same action, or a further stage in it, we find him the same timid, unbelieving, calculating man, in the presence of Esau, as he had been, ere he had prevailed with the wrestler at Jabbok.

This is admonition for us. There may be exercise of spirit before God, and yet not much advance in the strength of the soul in carrying on its conflict with the world.

In no stage of his history does Jacob appear morally lower than in that which immediately follows **Peniel**.

He is not in anywise purified from himself. He calculates, he prevaricates, he affects amiability and with confidence, he lies, he flatters. He stood against the stranger at Jabbok. He was strong in faith, glorifying the grace of God, even when the way of God had a controversy with him. But before Esau he practises and acts the old man to shameful perfection. He rids himself of his brother by a grossly false pretence. He is nothing better than a mean flatterer, a servile courtier, shamelessly speaking of the face of Esau

as of the face of God. It is all miserable — a humbling picture of the moral condition to which a saint may come, for a time, if nature be allowed.

There are moments of exhilaration of spirit, and we may be thankful for them; as when Jacob had so lately, in the preceding chapter, said, "*This is God's host;*" and again, "*I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.*"

These are moments of exhilaration of spirit. But then, they may be only *refreshments*, and not solid edification. And sad indeed it is to see a saint after them returning so quickly to himself. "*Where is then the blessedness ye spake of?*"

And who will trust his own heart, when we thus see that Jacob's was so untrue? Jacob had lost the knowledge of God's name. He had to inquire after it, instead of using it and enjoying it. That name was "*Almighty*," the name that told him of all-sufficiency for all his need. But Jacob had lost it in **Gen. 32**, and he is not as one who had recovered it in **Gen. 33**.

He is contriving for himself. And we may, in like manner, lose the name that has been revealed to us. That name is "*Father*" — a name that may give abiding calmness and strength and liberty to the soul. It prepares a home for the heart. "*He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God.*"

This home is enough to make our joy full, as John speaks. And though we may be under His hand for discipline, as Jacob was, still we are to know the power of that name, the full, secret, unchanging love of a father. Like Jacob in these two chapters, we have lost the name of God, if it be not thus with our souls. "*Ye have forgotten the exhortation that speaketh unto you as unto children,*" says the apostle to us. And Jacob, therefore, may be no longer such a wonder to us, but we may the rather at times be a wonder to ourselves.

After this, in his journey onward from the place where he and Esau parted, he reaches **Succoth**, and then **Shechem**, and we may say, he had then returned to Canaan. But it is only still worse and worse with him. He seems for a while to have entirely forgotten himself and the call of God. And mischief must follow this. Consistency with our calling is looked for. We are all, it may be in a thousand ways, untrue to it; but if it be willingly disregarded by an easy, relaxing conscience, the commonest moral defences may soon give way. Truth and integrity may be forced to yield, and such pollutions may at last be found, that would not, as the apostle speaks, be named among the Gentiles.

At **Succoth**, where our patriarch first arrived, he builds a house; and then at Shalem, in **Shechem**, he buys a field — what Abraham and Isaac truer to the call of God, never did, and never would have done. How could he count on moral security under such circumstances?

The tent had been exchanged for a house, and the pilgrim stranger had become a citizen and a freeholder. Was not all this a forgetting of himself under the call of God?

The Lord, long after this, lets David know, by His servant Nathan, that there was a difference between a *home* and a *tent*, and that He would have that difference maintained. **1 Chr. 17**

But here at Succoth, Jacob violates this. So also it is the divine memorial of the patriarchs in their purity, that they dwelt in tents (**Heb. 11: 9**); but here at Succoth, Jacob willingly forfeits that memorial. And again, the Lord did not give Abraham so much land as to set his foot on (**Acts 7: 5**); but here at Shalem in Shechem, Jacob, in spite of this, will have a parcel of ground, and buy it for an inheritance.

The altar, which comes next, in the catalogue, to the house and the field, may appear at first to be a relief and a sanctifier, the one good thing in the midst of corruption. But it is, perhaps, the worst of all. It was not raised to Him who had appeared to him.

There had been no communion between the Lord and Jacob, at either Succoth or Shechem. Shechem was not Bethel, and this parcel of ground, where El-elohe-Israel was raised, was not the place of stones and destitution, where abounding grace had shone from an open heaven on the unfriended head of the patriarch, but the parcel of a field which Jacob had bought of the children of Hamor, the father of Shechem. It was raised, not by a heavenly stranger to the God who visited him, but in the midst of the uncircumcised. It looks like an attempt to get the Lord's sanction of Jacob's loss of his separated, pilgrim, Nazarite character; to link His name and His worship with that on which His judgment was resting, and toward which His long-suffering was shown till iniquity was full.

Surely it is rather an uncircumcised Jacob we see here, and not circumcised Shechemites. It is all miserable. Is this a son of Abraham? Is this a saint of God? Is this one of God's strangers in a world that has revolted from Him?

This is like the religious energy of Christendom, which has put the name of Christ in company with the world that is under His judgment, and only borne with in His long-suffering. It is as if Israel had consented to Pharaoh, and undertaken to give Jehovah an altar in Egypt. But such altars are no altars — as another gospel is not another. Such religion is vain, whether practised in these earliest days at Shechem, or now in these days of Christendom, among the nations of a judged, condemned world, from which separation is the call of God. But this will not do. A fair trade with the world will be followed, and the course of it pursued greedily, without watchfulness or conviction, but religious family services, and religious national ordinances, the modern order at Shechem, will all the while be waited on.

It was of the fruit of all this that Jacob had afterwards to say, "*O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united.*"

For it is to the action in **Gen. 34** that Jacob thus refers when he was about to die in **Gen. 49**. He finds out, at the end, the real character of all this, the fruit of his dwelling at Shechem. In self-will a man had been killed there, and a fence thrown down. But surely Jacob himself had digged down God's fence before. The partition-wall which the call of God had raised between the clean and the unclean, between the circumcision and the Gentile, he himself, in spirit, had broken down, when he settled as a citizen or freeholder on his purchased estate at Shechem. And Simeon and Levi may perfect this, as soon afterwards as they please.

"And Dinah, the daughter of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land." **Gen. 34: 1**

Was this the way of the house of Abraham? Was this the family of the separated patriarch keeping the way of the Lord? Had Abraham been thus slack? What intercourse had he had for his children with either the sons or the daughters of the land?

It is all sad, and proclaims its own shame. Shechem is next door to Sodom. But it is not Sodom, I grant. Jacob is not Lot. We can distinguish; and we have to distinguish, though it is sad to be put to the work of distinguishing. Nature prevails, in some more, in some less. in all the recorded saints of God. But there is *moral variety*, as well as the *prevalency of nature*, and "*things*

that differ" among the saints are to be distinguished by us. There is a *soiled* garment, and there is a *mixed* garment.

Our way, under the Spirit, is to keep the garment both unsoiled and unmixed. Surely it is to keep ourselves "*unspotted from the world.*" But still, a *soiled* garment is not a *mixed* garment, a garment, as Scripture speaks, "*of divers sorts, of woollen and of linen.*" Nor is a garment with a thread of "*another sort*" now and again in it, to be mistaken for a mixed garment, the texture of which is wrought on the very principle of woollen and linen.

Scripture, ever fruitful and perfect, exhibits characters formed by what are called "mixed principles," and also characters which occasionally betray the mixture, but which are not formed throughout by them.

The life of Lot was formed throughout by mixed principles. As soon as temptation addressed him, he entered into connection with evil. Though associated with the call of God, he had to be saved so as by fire. The garment which Lot wore was of divers sorts, of woollen and of linen. Abraham, at times, wore a soiled garment, but never a mixed one. Lot was untrue to the call of God from the outset of his career to the close of it. He became a citizen where he should have been a stranger, taking a house in the city of Sodom, while Abraham was traversing the face of the country from tent to tent. And Lot's life of false principles leads him into sorrows that are his shame — and that is the real misery of sorrow. He had no comfort in his sorrow. His righteous soul was vexed: this is told of him; but there was no joy, no brightness, no triumph in his spirit. The angels maintained much reserve towards him. He had to escape with his life as a prey, and under the loss of all beside.

Our Jacob was not of this generation. We dare not say he was a man of mixed principles, or one who wore a garment of divers sorts, of woollen and linen. But he had a soiled garment on him pretty commonly, and here at Succoth and at Shechem, a garment with threads of another sort woven in it. His schemes and calculations disfigure him, and are the soiled garment; his building a house at Succoth, and purchasing a field at Shechem, untrue to the call of God, and to the tent-life of his fathers look very like a garment with threads of another sort in it.

Still Jacob is not to be put with Lot. His life was not *formed* of mixed principles. He was indeed a stranger with God in the earth. But, like Lot, he

had been in the place of the uncircumcised willingly; and he was now to feel the bitterness of his own way; and very much what Sodom had been to Lot, Shechem is now to Jacob. He is saved (may I not say?) yet so as by fire.

The iniquity of Simeon and Levi, with the instruments of cruelty that were in their habitations, bring poor Jacob very low. He is at his wits' end in the midst of that people, of whom he had purchased his estate, and in the neighbourhood of whom, he had, Lot-like, consented to settle.

Things, however, are now at the worst. We are about to make, through the grace of God, a happy escape with Jacob out of all this, to find a good riddance of Shechem and all its pollutions.

"A word spoken in due season, how good is it!" We often prove this ourselves. A word will do more for us at times than long and careful discourses.

For *"power belongeth unto God."* *"Follow me,"* from the lips of Christ, had power to detach Levi from the receipt of custom; while, in the same chapter, a discourse was heard by Peter without effect, being left by it, as he had been before it, the easy, kind-hearted, amiable, and obliging Peter. See **Luke 5.**

"Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power," even that very people, of whom it had been said before, *"All day long have I stretched out my hands unto a disobedient and gain saying people."*

An instance of this power is found in the history of Jacob, just at this time, in **Gen. 35: 1.**

"Arise, go up to Bethel," said the Lord to him, *"and dwell there; and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother."*

These few words were with power. They formed, I believe, the great era in the life of Jacob, or rather, in the history of his soul. They were few and simple, unaccompanied by anything strange or startling, no vision or miracle attending them; but they were a day of power. He had already come forth from the vision of the ladder at Bethel, from the magnificent sight of the angelic host at Mahanaim, and from the wrestling of the divine Stranger at Peniel, scarcely helped or advanced at all in the real energy of his soul. But now, power visits him; and power with God may use as weak an

instrument as it pleases; it matters not. The hand of God can do the business of God, though it have but a sling and a stone, or the jaw-bone of an ass, or lamps and pitchers; and the Spirit of God can do the business of God with souls, though He use but a word, or a look, or a groan.

These few words which open **Gen. 35** prevail over Jacob. "*Arise, go up to Bethel.*"

Bethel is rewritten on his heart and conscience as by the finger of God. He falls before it, as Abraham, in **Gen. 17**, had fallen before the name of "*God Almighty,*" or as Peter, long after, in **Luke 22** fell before the look of Jesus.

Power is always its own witness, as light is. These words, carrying the power of God with them, are everything now to the soul of our patriarch. They manifest their virtue at once, just as the one touch of the woman in the crowd did. As soon as Jacob heard them, without fuller commandment to do so, he cleanses his household, and will have his tents purified of all the abominations which they had brought with them out of Padan. In spirit he was already at Bethel, the place where God had met him in the riches of His grace, in the day of his degradation and misery. Bethel had been reintroduced to his heart — yea, manifested to his soul in greater vividness than ever. He now read the story of grace clearer than ever; and *grace pleads for holiness.*

The feast of unleavened bread waits on the Passover. The grace of God that bringeth salvation teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. For grace, again I say it, pleads for holiness. And so, Jacob, now hearing Bethel in the power of the Spirit, without further ordinance, or requirement, or command, will have his house and his household clean.

This is full of beauty and meaning. Pollution cannot be allowed by one who is in the sense and joy of abounding grace. Gods and earrings, idols and vanities, are together buried under an oak at Shechem, and Shechem is left behind.

The patriarch rises up with all that was his, and is quickly on the road to Bethel. He had kept the feast of unleavened bread in company with the Passover, as Israel afterwards did in Egypt; but, like Israel too, he is at once, with staff in hand and shoe on foot, leaving his Egypt behind him. And the Lord accompanies him, as He did Israel in the day of their Exodus

afterwards; and accompanies in *strength* too; for, as the rod of Moses opened the way of Israel in the face of enemies, and He that was in the cloud looked out and troubled the host of Pharaoh, so now, we read of Jacob and his household, *"they journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob."*

This is surely full of beauty and meaning, I may again say. There is mercy and blessing here, but there is humbling also. Israel had lost the power of God's name, and Jacob must now learn that he had lost also the honour of his own name. But all shall be given back to him. *"God Almighty,"* and *"Israel,"* and *"Bethel"* are revealed afresh, at this moment of revival.

God must be worshipped as the God of salvation. To be sure He must, in such a world as this. Such worship is the only worship *"in truth."* **John 4: 23.**

In **Lev. 17** and in **Deut. 12** the divine jealousy touching this is strongly expressed. It is as *"Saviour,"* He records His name in a scene of sin and death. As He says by His prophet, *"There is no God else beside; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me."* **Isa. 45: 21**

This is revelation of Him; and on this all worship is grounded. In this He records His name, and there is His house of praise. At Bethel, God has thus recorded His name, and there was His house, and there Jacob now brings his sacrifices. He raises his altar, and calls it El-Bethel. With Jacob, that was the Tabernacle of the wilderness, or the Temple on Mount Moriah, the Temple on Ornan's threshing-floor. And this was infinitely acceptable, and God gave fervent and immediate witness of such acceptableness; for He appeared to him at once at the altar there, and blessed him, and said, *"Thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and He called his name Israel. And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; and the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac. to thee will I give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land. And God went up from him in the place where He talked with him."*

This was the expression of divine acceptance, and delight in Jacob's altar at Bethel. This was like the glory filling the Tabernacle in **Exodus 40**, and again filling the Temple in **2 Chr. 5**.

This was the God of grace and salvation with desire occupying the house and accepting the worship which a poor sinner, who had tasted abounding grace, had raised and rendered to Him. Nothing can exceed the interest of such a moment. Solomon felt the power of such a moment; for on seeing the glory fill the house which he had built, he utters his heart in these admirable words: *"The Lord hath said that He would dwell in the thick darkness. But I have built a house of habitation for Thee, and a place for Thy dwelling forever."*

The Temple, where mercy was seen to rejoice against judgment, had power to draw the Lord God from the thick darkness, the retreat of righteousness, into the midst of His worshipping people.

What could exceed this? And, in patriarchal days, this was seen at this altar or temple at Bethel. The glory was there. The Lord appeared there, and spoke there to Jacob, as afterwards to Solomon. Luz was as Ornan's threshing-floor, and each of them had become God's house. And Jacob called the place, a second time, Bethel, but without any of the misgivings that had soiled his spirit when he was there at the first. He is now there in the spirit of Solomon before the glory in the Temple, knowing God's return to him, and His nearness and presence with him.

Then, in the freedom and strength of all this, our patriarch resumes his journey. He goes from Bethel to Bethlehem, and from thence, by the tower of Edar, to Mamre, in the south country, where his father Isaac was dwelling. But in none of these places do we read of house or land again. It is the tent and the altar and the pillar, the journeying onward still, the burial of his aged father, and at last, as one with his fathers, dwelling in the land where they had dwelt before him. See **Gen. 37: 1**

This was indeed a different journey, in its moral character, from the one which he had before taken from Padan to Mount Gilead, and from thence onward to Shechem through Mahanaim and Succoth.

Jacob is unrebuked now. We have no wrestling as at Peniel, no peremptory voice summoning away as from Shechem. No fears are awakened in our hearts respecting him, lest the tent may be deserted again, or the call of God be forgotten. The word "Bethel," on the lips of the Lord and on the ear of Jacob, had done wonders. *"A word spoken in due season, how good is it!"* surely we may again remember. *"Behold, God exalteth by His power: who teacheth like Him?"*

And He might surely have challenged His erring but convicted child, after this second scene at Bethel, and said to him in the words of Isaiah, "*Thus saith the Lord thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go.*"

It is not that all is perfected as yet. Reuben's iniquity may tell us this too painfully. But the rising up from the place of nature, and the moral extrication of his heart from the spirit of the world, have taken place.

Nor is it that he is as yet beyond the place of discipline. That is not so. He does not find Rebecca with Isaac at Mamre.

He never sees his mother again, the mother who had so preserved him and cherished him. His mother's nurse he buries; and more than that, his beloved Rachel he loses. He has indeed the pledge of strength in "*the son of his right hand,*" but that same son told of sorrow touching Rachel. And thus he is under discipline still.

But he is in God's way, as well as under God's *hand*. That is the new thing. Discipline is telling upon him, and reaching its end. The path is shining, and its latest hour will soon be found to be its brightest.

PART 4 — GENESIS 37-50 (Journey to Egypt and back home) 130 to 147 years

When we enter upon **Gen. 37** we find *Joseph* to be principal in the action, and principal in the thoughts of the Spirit of God. This is evident from the second verse: "*These are the generations of Jacob, Joseph being seventeen years old,*" etc. But we get detached notices of Jacob from this chapter to the end of the book, and which give us the last portion of his history.

He was now, as I may call him, a widower. He appears before us as a lonely, retired man, with more of recollections than of present activities about him. He was indeed the patriarch, the common head and father of all the households of his children, and so recognized by them. But the *business* of the family was rather in their hands; and he was passing his widowerhood without seeking to be again the stirring, energetic man he had once been.

His retirement, however, was not like that of his father Isaac. Isaac, for the last forty years of his life, is not seen. He appears to have been laid aside, as a vessel unfit for use, as I have observed of him, not *wearing* out, as the word is, but *rusting* out.

But this was not Jacob's closing years. He was no longer a man of business, but his retirement was not inactive. The richest, happiest, and purest exercises of his soul seem to be now, and they enlarge and deepen as they advance; chastened and disciplined as we have seen, his soul is now rendering the fruit of divine husbandry. We cannot fully say that Jacob ever reached the high dignity of being a servant of God; but we may say when we have reached the end of his story, that he was fruitful to Him.

There is a difference between *service* and *fruitfulness*.

Service is more manifested and active, fruitfulness may be hidden. The hand or the foot may serve, and so they should. Tipped with the blood and with the oil, they are to be instruments in the hands of the Master of the house; but it is in the deep, secret places of the heart that the husbandry of the saint, in the power of the Spirit through the truth, is to be yielding fruit to God.

Fruitfulness is known in the cultivation of those graces and virtues which give real and intrinsic character to the people of God — those habits and tempers and properties of the inner man which, with God, are of great

price. It is within, or "out of the heart," that those herbs, meet for Him by whom the soul is dressed, grow fragrant and beautiful, such as bespeaks the virtue of that rain from heaven which has fallen upon it.

It is this fruitfulness, as I judge, which will be found in our Jacob, in this last scene of his pilgrimage. We have had some fainter notice of this, while yet he remained in Canaan, and ere he took his journey to Egypt, But the richer harvest of this husbandry is gathered during the seventeen years that he spent in that land, ere he himself was gathered to his fathers. For this participation of God's holiness, this fruit of the discipline of the Father of spirits, is commonly gradual — and we shall find it to be so in Jacob — the light shining more and more unto the perfect day; the last hour being the brightest.

In the course of **Gen. 37**, which I have now reached, we are told that the brethren of Joseph were gone to feed their flocks at Shechem. But why was this recurrence to Shechem? Was it that the purchased land, the family estate, was there? It was a dangerous place to be connected with. It had proved a snare to the whole family, and the Lord had called them from it.

Had Jacob been as watchful as he should have been we might not now have heard again of Shechem and of the flocks and the brethren there. But still, it is happy to see that there were symptoms of uneasiness in his mind about it; for he sends Joseph to find out how the flocks and the brethren were faring there, as though there were some misgiving in his heart about them in so suspected a place. And this may be received as the pulse of a quickened state of soul in our patriarch, though that pulse is but weak.

This parcel of ground, at last, becomes only a burying-place, like Machpelah; but it had not, at first, been purchased as such, as Machpelah was.

So afterwards in **Gen. 43**, when he is sending away his sons, the second time, into Egypt to buy food, he commits them into the hand of the Lord as "*God Almighty.*" "*God Almighty,*" says he, "*give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother and Benjamin.*"

This also tells happily of Jacob's condition of soul — that in some measure at least *he had recovered the power of that name which he had once lost*, and which, as

we saw, all the exercise, through which he had passed at Peniel had not given back to him.

From these testimonies we may say that Jacob was under godly exercise, by the hand of the Father of his spirit, in those early days. Beyond this I need not notice him, till we see him preparing to go down to see his son in Egypt before he die. But that moment was a very important moment indeed in the progress of his soul — and we must meditate on it.

On his hearing that Joseph was yet alive, and governor over all the land of Egypt, we read that his heart fainted, for he believed it not. It was the Lord's doing — for so the fact was — but it was marvellous in Jacob's eyes. He "*believed not for joy, and wondered;*" for this was receiving Joseph alive from the dead. At first this was too much for him. but when he saw the wagons which king Pharaoh had sent to bear him, and all that belonged to him, down to Egypt, his spirit revived, and he said without further delay, "*It is enough, Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die.*"

Nature thus spake at once in Jacob, as soon as the report was believed; and without further challenge he begins his journey to Egypt. But a calmer moment, as we shall now see, succeeds this outburst or ebullition of nature, and then the way of nature is challenged.

"And Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifice to the God of his father Isaac."

This is remarkable. Why these sacrifices at Beersheba? There had been none at Mamre, ere Jacob set out. Why, then, this halt at Beersheba, and this service to the God of Isaac?

This may at first be wondered at; but it will be found to be common enough (I had almost said, necessary) in the ways of the people of God.

Nature had acted in Jacob at Mamre as soon as he believed the report about Joseph, and set him at once on the road to Egypt. But now the *spiritual sensibilities* have waked up, and are challenging the conclusions and ways of nature. Very common this is. The *saint* is now feeling reserve, where the *father* had felt none. Jacob had not dealt with the Lord about this journey, as he was beginning it; but the mind of Christ in him, his conscience in the Holy Ghost, so to speak, is now taking the lead, and the judgment of nature is reviewed, and reviewed in the light of the Lord.

Many years before this the Lord had said to Isaac. Go not down into Egypt (**Gen. 26: 2**); and this had been said to Isaac in a day of famine, like the present. And this is remembered by Jacob as soon as he reaches Beersheba, the last spot in the southern quarters of the land, which lay in the way to Egypt, and in the view of which was stretched out that country to which Isaac had thus been warned not to go.

All this accounts to me for Jacob's sacrifices at Beersheba to the God of his father Isaac. And all this has great moral meaning in it. It was a mighty stir in Jacob's soul, and it was very acceptable to the Lord. As we find in the day of the siege of Samaria. The poor lepers outside the city immediately feed themselves and gather for themselves among the tents of the Syrians. It was natural, almost necessary, that they should do so. But soon afterwards another mind begins to stir in them, as here in our patriarch, and they say, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household. **2 Kings 7**

This was the action of a better mind, like this present stir in Jacob's spirit. And this awakening in Jacob is so acceptable with the Lord, that He comes at once to him with these words of consolation, *"I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes."*

When we consider this for a moment, we may well say, what a communication this was! How thoroughly did it let Jacob know that the Lord had read all his heart, his present fears and his earlier affections, the mind of the father and the mind of the saint, the desires of nature and the sensibilities of the spirit. *"Fear not to go down into Egypt"* calmed the present uneasiness of his renewed mind; *"Joseph shall surely put his hand upon thy eyes,"* gratified the earlier desire of his heart over his long-lost child. How full all this was! How perfectly did it prove the reality of the sympathy of Christ with all that was stirring in His elect one! Jacob found pity in Him, and grace for seasonable help.

"When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, thou knewest my path," was said by David, and is here surely understood by Jacob. The groan that was not uttered by him in man's ear, had, in all its meaning, entered the ear of Him

who searcheth the heart. And after this, Jacob can no longer halt at Beersheba, or question his further journey to Egypt.

He accomplishes it; and his first sight of Joseph, as we might have expected, and as the Lord would have fully warranted it to be, was the occasion of fullest joy to his long-bereaved heart.

And I would here observe, that I have felt, as to Jacob in these his last years, that he had become a very *affectionate* old man; and this is a happy impression, another witness of an improved state of heart. For a calculating man, such as he had been in the habits and activities of his life, is commonly, and somewhat of moral necessity, wanting in thoughtfulness and desire respecting others. He is too much, of course, his own object. But now it is not thus with Jacob. His grief at the loss of Joseph was intense. He bewails Simeon bitterly as well, and seems ready to brave the horrors of famine, rather than hazard the loss of any more of the children. And then, at the close of these years, his adoption of the sons of Joseph, his sympathy with Joseph in his sorrow over the preference of the younger, his reference to Rachel and her burial at Ephrath, and his mention of Leah, and of his fathers and their wives in connection with Machpelah, all is from a loving heart. And the general grief which his death occasioned would tell us that he had been, in the midst of the people, a loved, affectionate old man. It is delightful to mark all this.

But with all this we find him, in his own person and ways, very much the same widowed, solitary man in Egypt as we saw him to have been for years in Canaan ere he came out. Only it was thus under very strong temptation to be otherwise; for he maintained his strangership, though he now had opportunity to make the earth again the scene of his efforts and expectations. We do like *reflected* dignity. We know the charms of it full well. If nature were given its way, we would be making the most of our parentage, and connections, and set off before others our alliance with that which is honourable in our generation. Jacob, in Egypt, had some of the very best opportunities for indulging his heart in that way. His son was then the pride of that land. Joseph was the second man in the kingdom, and Joseph was Jacob's son. Here was a temptation to Jacob to come forth and show himself to the world. Joseph's father would have been an object. Would not all eyes be upon him?

Would not place be given to him and way made for him, whenever or wherever he appeared? Nature would have said; If Jacob had such opportunities, let him show himself to the world. The spirit of the world must have suggested that; as long afterwards to a greater than Jacob, who had no *reflected* glories to exhibit, but all *personal* glories. "*If thou do these things, show thyself to the world.*" See **John 7: 4**. But, in the spirit of one who, in his way, had overcome the world, Jacob continues a retired man through all his life of seventeen years in Egypt. He was a stranger, where every human attraction joined in tempting, him to be a citizen.

To me, I own, this is exquisite fruit of a chastened mind, fruit of divine discipline, the witness of a large participation of the holiness of God, the holiness that suited the calling of God, the calling that made Jacob a stranger and pilgrim on the earth. At Shechem he reminded us of Lot in Sodom, but here he reminds us of Abraham in his victory over all the offers of the king of Sodom.

But with this separation from the world there is nothing of false humility. In the midst of all this practical strangership he knows and exercises his dignity under God. As he enters, and as he leaves the presence of Pharaoh (**Gen. 47**), he blesses him. This is to be observed. As he stood there in the royal presence, he owned himself a pilgrim on the earth, somewhat poor and weary too; but at his introduction and on his exit he blesses him, as one who knew what he was in the election and grace of God; for "*without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better.*" This is not what old Simeon did when he had the infant of Bethlehem in his arms, but this is what old Jacob now does, when he has the greatest man on the earth before him. He made no requests of the king, though he might reasonably have expected whatever he asked. He was silent as to all that Pharaoh or Egypt would do for him, but he speaks as the better one blessing the less again and again. This was like the chained prisoner of Rome before the dignitaries and officers of Rome. Paul let Agrippa know — he let the Roman governor know — that he, their prisoner, carried and owned the good thing, and that he could wish no better wish for them all, than that they were as he was. And this is faith that glorifies grace — the proper business of faith — precious faith indeed, whether in a prisoner-apostle, or in an exile stranger-patriarch. Rome and Egypt have the wealth and power of the world, such as

men will envy and praise, but Paul and Jacob carry a secret with them that makes them speak another language.

This is all full of meaning in our Jacob. The glory is hidden in an earthen vessel, but it is there, and the vessel knows it to be there. Jacob does nothing in those Egypt-years of his, to make history for the world. He takes no part in its changes; its interests and progress are lost upon him; he is at the disposal of others, taking what they may give him, and being what they may make him; but he knows a secret that takes his spirit above them. Others may flourish in Egypt; he only spends the remnant of his days there. See **Gen. 47: 27, 28.**

I own indeed that I stand in admiration of this way of the Lord, of the Spirit of God, with Jacob. To such a life as his had been, most suited was such an end as this now is. It is a poor thing that we should need such a pause as this, at the end of the journey; but, if needed, it is beautiful to see it fruitful, after this manner. During that long husbandry of his soul under "*the Father of spirits,*" that seventeen years in Egypt, how commonly, I dare to suppose, did Jacob sit before the Lord, meditating the past years, with some confusion of face; and the fire would kindle then, and the refiner's work go on.

But when these silent and retired years are about to close, we find him, somewhat abruptly, stirring and earnest. It is with Joseph respecting his burial. He will have Joseph not only promise, but swear, that he will bury him in the land of his fathers. **Chap. 47: 30**

This is also very beautiful. We never find him urgent about the conditions of his *life* in Egypt; he seems willing, as I said, to take what they give him and to be what they make him; but as to his *burial*, he is, now, all urgency and decision. He will have it confirmed to him by an oath, that his son will take his dead body to that land which witnessed the promise of God to him. He is earnest and peremptory now, as he was indifferent before. Faith likes to read its title clear; full, and indefeasible. Abraham would have the inheritance by *covenant*, as well as by word. **Gen. 15**

Jacob now will have the burial, such a burial as is worthy of the hopes of a child of Abraham, by *oath*, as well as by *promise*.

All this shows us another Jacob than what we once knew him to be. He is now partaker of God's holiness; his mind and character are in consistency with the call of God. He is a stranger with God in the earth, but in sure and certain hope of promised inheritance. This is fruitfulness; I say not that it is service; but it is beautiful fruitfulness in the inner man.

In **Gen. 48** which follows, we get that one act in his life which is signalized by the Spirit as the act of faith. **Heb. 11: 21** But the whole chapter is beautiful. All is *grace* on God's part, and all is *faith* in the heart of Jacob. For it is the proper business and duty of *faith* to accept the decisions of grace and that is just what grace is doing here. Grace adopts the sons of Joseph, who had no title in the flesh, and takes them into the family of Abraham. Grace gives the place and portion of the firstborn, the double portion, as though they were Reuben and Simeon. Grace sets the younger of them above the elder. And grace gives Joseph, or the adopted firstborn, an earnest of his coming inheritance. To all this Jacob bows and is obedient. In faith he accepts the decisions of grace. Nature may resent this; but Jacob is true to the word of grace committed to him Joseph was moved when Jacob was setting Ephraim above Manasseh. Jacob feels for him; but he fulfils the word of God committed to him, let nature be surprised or wounded as it may. He does not listen to nature in his son Joseph, as he had listened to it on a like occasion, years and years ago, in his mother Rebecca.*

*In Joseph obtaining the rights of the firstborn, there is something besides grace; but I do not notice it here.

Surely this is beautiful: faith thus accepting the decisions of grace. But in this, Jacob was also God's oracle. He was not only in faith obedient to the purpose or counsel of grace, but he was used of God as a vessel of His house, used to declare His mind, to represent and act His purposes in these mysteries of grace, the *adoption*, and the *inheritance*, and the *earnest*.

And as this vessel was thus so fully approving itself fit for the Master's use, it is still used. We still see him and hear him as God's oracle, as we enter **Gen. 49**. He calls his twelve sons, and blesses them. He delivers, under the Spirit, the words and judgments of God touching them even though this was a very trying moment to him. It exceeds all in what it cost him. In preferring Ephraim to Manasseh, he suffered something. But he, who did not then attend to nature in his son, will not now attend to it in himself. He

goes through this sorrowful, humbling scene, feeling it bitterly at certain stages of it; but he still goes on with it and through it. He had now to retrace, under the Spirit, and as the oracle of God, and in their presence, the ways of his sons in past days, and the fruit of these ways in days still to come. He had to do much of this with a wounded heart, and with recollections that might well be deeply humbling. For these words upon his sons were a certain kind of judgment upon himself for his past carelessness about his children. But still he does go on and finishes his service, as the oracle of God, and that too with such sympathies and affections as give us some further beautiful witnesses of his purified state of soul.

Levi's and Simeon's iniquity has to come before him. But he resents this now in a way, no trace of which we find in him in the day when that iniquity was perpetrated. It troubled him then because of the mischief which it might work for him among his neighbours. "*Ye have troubled me,*" said he, "*to make me 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.*" **Gen. 34: 30** This was the mind he was in when he was a citizen in Shechem. But now it is on other ground altogether, higher and purer ground, that his soul refuses this iniquity. It was iniquity; that is enough; and he will not let his honour be united with it. Then he opens his eyes on the uncleanness of Reuben, just to be shocked by it. And then, as the backsliding of Dan is summoned up before him, his whole soul is moved, and he is cast on the hope of God's salvation, his only escape, the only escape which he would own, from all that was around him, behind him, or before him. "*Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path that biteth the horse's heels, so that his rider shall fall backward. I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.*"

What affections and energies are here! How finely this vessel did its service in the house of God! Poor David knew more than sorrow for the loss of Absalom in the day of Absalom's fall. That slaying of his son brought sin to remembrance. And here Jacob entered, with full personal sympathies, into the counsels of God, and had his own part and share in recollections that must have stirred the conscience.

He not only announced these judgments of God, but felt them. He was not a *mere* vessel, but a *living* vessel. And he was faithful to Him that appointed

him, though the service was, after this manner, full of humbling and bitterness.

We saw Jacob "*dumb for a season.*" This we noticed as the character of many years of our Patriarch's closing life. But his mouth had now been opened by faith; and once opened, God uses him abundantly as His oracle. This is like Zacharias, the Zacharias of **Luke 1**. He also, as we know, had been dumb for a season; but in faith he wrote his child's name upon a writing-table, and then the Lord used him as His prophet.

Here the story ends; but I believe we have gathered the moral of it. The Lord's hand with Jacob tells us how unwearied He is with His foolish and wayward ones. It is *variety*, too, as well as *patience* that we see in this constant moral culture. Jacob had to learn different lessons; and He, with whom he had to do, set Himself in patient grace to teach them all to him. Bethel, Peniel, Bethel again and Beersheba witness this, as we have seen. And then throughout a changeful course, at home and abroad, in youth and in manhood, among strangers or at the side of his father and his mother, Jacob betrayed much that needed chastening, and the lesson was taught him again and again.

He reminds us of the disciples in the days of the Lord. In how many ways had the Lord to correct and instruct them! And it was the same to the end; and the patience of their divine Teacher was the same to the end. The ignorance, the selfishness, the constant moral mistakes they made and betrayed, the different ways in which they crossed the mind of their Master, all glorify the goodness that waited on them. And it may remind us also of Him who bore with Israel's manners in the wilderness for forty years. And it may be also a remembrancer to ourselves of much of that patience and grace which we are daily experiencing at the same hand.

Discipline, the discipline of a child, is illustrated in Jacob, as we observed at the beginning, ere we began to consider his story, and as we now have seen it to be. And discipline is healthful, and does good like a medicine. If we need it, it is the *only* thing for us. When in the days of Samuel, Israel asked for a king, would it have been well for them, if the Lord had given them David? The Lord had David in reserve for them; but would it have been seasonable, would it have been healthful for them, if David had been given to them at once, when with a rebellious will they were asking for a king?

Surely, they must first be made to know the bitterness of their own way. A Saul must be given when Israel asks a king. This was discipline, and this was the only thing that would have been healthful for them. But when they have tasted the bitterness of their own way, in pity of their misery, the Lord will bring out that which He has in reserve for them, the man after His own heart that shall fulfil all His pleasure.

How perfect was all this! Had David been given to Israel in the day of **1 Sam. 11** the whole moral of the story would have been lost to us. But the love is the same, whether it be for *discipline* or *consolation*, *medicine* or *food*.

This is the characteristic lesson we learn from the story of our patriarch.

With Machpelah and his burial, Jacob then *ends* these dying intercourses with his sons, as he had *begun* them. **Gen. 47:29; Gen. 49:29**

He had Joseph's word and oath already on this matter, and now he must put all of them under the same engagements to him about it. Death was more important to him than life. Life kept him in Egypt, death would restore him to Canaan. Death linked him with the God and the promise of his fathers. The hopes of faith lay beyond life, and outside Egypt. In spirit he was saying; "*Absent from the body, present with the Lord*"; "*Confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.*"

As far as patriarchal faith could utter this, Jacob was uttering it. And at the very last we read, "*When Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.*"

It was surely no barren or unfruitful time he had spent in Egypt. Though to him and to his hands the business of life was all over, he was not *rusting* out, as we had to say of Isaac. Jacob's silence was husbandry. We rejoice in these last days as his best days. We rejoice still more in the grace which provided this pause for him at the end of his journey, that, in the language of the Psalmist, he might recover strength before he went hence, and was no more seen. **Psalm 39:13**

Gracious indeed is it towards all of us His elect ones, to have such a sight as this, such a specimen of divine patience, wisdom, and goodness, as this. It is peculiar indeed, having its own place amid the infinite forms and characters which grace assumes in relation to the need of the saints. Jacob's last days were his golden days. To others, to their flocks and herds, Egypt was a land

of Goshen; but it was not to Jacob's flocks and herds, for we do not read that he had any — but it was to Jacob's *soul* that Egypt was a Goshen, the very richest, fairest, best-watered land his spirit had ever enjoyed. It was more really the *gate of heaven* to him than **Bethel** had been. It was more the *face of God* to him than **Peniel** had been. He had the Lord in secret and in silence with him there, but in real, living power. With all that would naturally have kept him at home on the earth he was a stranger. In Egypt Jacob was a delivered, extricated man, as from the beginning and all through he had been a chosen and a called one.

Are we learning that which God was teaching him there? Are we seeking, with more single heart, the portion of God's strangers and pilgrims, thinking rather of Machpelah than of Egypt, of the rapture that links us with the promise, than of all the daily growing prosperity of this present evil world?

#73 Little Flock - H. Bonar

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| <p>1. <i>I was a wandering sheep, I did not love the fold; I did not love my Shepherd's voice. I would not be controlled: I was a wayward child, I did not love my home, I did not love my Father's voice, I loved afar to roam.</i></p> | <p>2. <i>The Shepherd sought His sheep The Father sought His child He followed me o'er vale and hill, O'er desert waste and wild: He found me nigh to death, Famished and faint and lone; He bound me with the chains of love, He saved the wandering one.</i></p> |
| <p>3. <i>Jesus my Shepherd is: 'Twas He that loved my soul, 'Twas He that washed me in His blood, 'Twas He that made me whole: 'Twas He that found the lost, That found the wandering sheep; 'Twas He that brought me to the fold: 'Tis He that still doth keep.</i></p> | <p>4. <i>No more a wandering sheep, I love to be controlled; I love my tender Shepherd's voice, I love the peaceful fold: No more a wayward child, I seek no more to roam; I love my heavenly Father's voice: I love, I love His home.</i></p> |

