

# Israel: A Prince with God

The Story of Jacob Retold

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE MID-PASSAGE OF LIFE

Genesis 30

Let us, then, be what we are; and speak what we think; and in all things  
Keep ourselves loyal to truth, and the sacred professions of friendship.  
Of all that is unsound, beware!"

- Longfellow

IN our last chapter, we saw how Jacob built for himself a home. But ah what a home! The presence of the two sisters there was fatal to its peace. They who had been happy enough as sisters before he came, could not now live in such close quarters, as wives of the same husband, without incessant jealousy and heart-burning. Each had her own grievance. Poor Leah knew that Jacob had never loved her; and that she was not the wife of his choice: and though God compensated her by giving her that pride of Oriental women, a family of sons, yet even this was a new source of anguish to her; for Rachel envied her. Frightfully desolate was she in that home; and the names of her sons are like so many landmarks of her misery. But Rachel must have been equally miserable: true, she had her husband's love, but she could not be sure of keeping it; and she had the mortification of seeing her sister's children growing up as her husband's heirs. How eagerly she prayed, and fretted, and proudly chafed! What wonder, then, that the children grew up wild and bad?

- Reuben, unstable as water, excitable and passionate;
- Simeon, quick to obey, but quick to desperate cruelty; and
- Levi, a willing accomplice in his crime.

When children turn out badly, and the beautiful gate of childhood does not lead to the fair temple of mature life, it is generally the fault of the home-training; and it is more often the result of what they see than of what they are taught. Whatever Jacob may have been and I fear that his example was none of the best, yet the impressions received in the women's tents, of high words and evil passion, would be enough to ruin any child. Beware how you act at home. Remember what keen little eyes are watching you; and with what absolute mimicry they will repeat what they see. But it is not so much Jacob's home life, as his business dealings, that we have now to consider.

He served fourteen years, as a dowry for his two wives; and at the time when Rachel gave birth to her first-born Joseph, that period had elapsed.

So soon as mother and child were able to undertake so long and fatiguing a journey, Jacob declared his intention of returning to Canaan; and this resolve was perhaps precipitated by a message from Rebekah, to say that there was now no further reason for his absence.

This proposal alarmed Laban, who had learnt to value his services; and was much too astute to let him go, without making an effort to retain so valuable a servant. “**Tarry,**” said he, “**I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes; for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake.**”

Jacob at once caught at the opportunity of making an independent provision for his large and increasing family; and the bargain was struck.

Eastern sheep are almost wholly white; the goats black; the parti-colored rare. Jacob proposed, therefore, that all the brown and speckled should be at once removed; and that all of that color, which the flock produced afterwards, should be his wage. There was no harm in this; unless he had already made up his mind to take the unfair advantage of Laban, which is a dark blot on his name. Supposing that this were the case, we have here a humiliating picture of two unprincipled men, each trying to outwit the other:

Laban chuckling over his bargain, and taking care to remove, not only the young, but the old, and sending them off under the care of his sons; Jacob, laughing in his sleeve, because he knew, or thought he knew, a plan of winning to himself a great advantage. But whether this were premeditated in the first instance or not, it is certain that Jacob acted as a cheat and a rogue.

Laban entrusted his flocks to his care without supposing for a moment that he would tamper with the usual course of nature. Jacob, on the other hand, did not scruple to use every art to secure his own advantage at Laban’s cost; taking means to procure for himself the produce of the strongest of the flock, and to leave to Laban the enfeebled and the weak.

It is very surprising to find how eagerly some of the older commentators try to vindicate Jacob in this. They might almost as soon sprinkle rose-water on a sewer. And it certainly lowers the standard of morality to attempt to prove that there was not very much harm after all in what Jacob did. I feel no temptation to do this.

The Bible does not hesitate to tell us the very worst about its heroes; that we may better magnify the grace of God, which, out of such materials, could create trophies of mercy. Let Jacob be painted in colours borrowed from Rembrandt’s brush; and there is all the more wonder that the grace of God could overcome his duplicity and cunning, and make of him a diamond of the very first water. Let us draw near, and remonstrate with Jacob, as he sits beside his flocks, in the scorching Eastern sun; and let us carefully notice his excuses and pleas.

He might urge, first, *the necessity of self-protection.*

“My uncle is bent on defrauding me, and keeping me down; and, if I did not do this, he would succeed. You must meet a man on his own ground; and, as he has chosen to play the rogue with me, I cannot see the harm of turning his own weapons on himself.”

This reasoning did not die with Jacob: it is still passed round the world in act and word; and good men are sometimes sorely tempted to make use of it. It is undoubtedly hard to find that another man is taking an unfair advantage of you by maneuvers which, from your soul, you loathe. But is that a justification for you to resort to them?

This has come into your life as a test; to prove whether you believe that the world is ordered by God or the devil. If you believe it is the devil's world, it is quite likely that you will try to hold your ground, or gain an advantage by arts, which he alone would approve. But if you really believe in the Almighty God, you will be sure that falsehood must ultimately fail, and righteousness finally win: and you will meet fraud by faith; cunning by conscience; and violence by a Divine virtue. Goliath may wear armour; but that is no reason why David should.

Remember how the Lord hath said: "**I will keep thee.**" Your competitors may do mean and dirty tricks; but you will live to see them trapped in their own pits, and pierced by their own swords: whilst if you continue to do right, you will go steadily forward to success; as the sun at noon rids himself of the clouds that obscured his early rays. "**Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Fret not thyself in any wise to do evil; for evildoers shall be cut off.**" "**The Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken.**"

He might urge, as a second plea, the familiar formula, *Business is business.*

"It is quite right to speak of Bethel when that sacred anniversary comes round; but it is out of the question to suppose that I can act and speak in my daily business, as I did when that angel-ladder glistened before my view. Business must be regulated on its own distinct laws; and they are quite different to those which obtain at Bethel."

It is strange to hear professing Christians speak thus. They have one standard of morality for the Lord's day; and another for the other six. They permit things in business which are contrary to the spirit and letter of the Word of God; and which they would not sanction for a moment in the ordinary dealings of daily life: and they quiet their conscience by the easy motto, *Business is business.*

I never can understand what difference there is in the morality of an act, because it has to do with buying and selling; or why we should not apply to such an act the same principles by which we judge other actions. According to the practice of some, we should read the golden rule thus: "Do as you would be done by except in business."

"**Do not steal**" applies everywhere except in shops and factories. "**Lying lips are always an abomination to the Lord**" - except when a salesman wants to dispose of some soiled goods. If this were the case, the larger part of the life of most men would be outside the circumference of God's commands. But it cannot be. The moralities of the Gospel resemble the law of gravitation: to which nothing is secular; nothing common; but which determines the pathway of a grain of dust on the autumn breeze, as well as the march of worlds.

But Jacob might urge, as his third plea, *that this was the general practice.*

“Other shepherds practice it. Laban must know all about it; or he might know. When you are with Chaldeans, you must do as Chaldeans do. I am not worse than others.”

But a universal practice does not condone sin; this is the difference between God’s laws and man’s. Let all men break a human law: it stands abrogated on the statute book; it cannot be enforced. But though all men break a Divine law, it will exact its penalty from all. Multitudes may have sinned together; but they will not be able to screen each other, or to escape. And if you do a mean thing, it will come back to roost in your heart; and will find you out with its curse, though you may be one of a crowd. But he might urge, as his fourth plea, *that chicanery was necessary to obtain bread.*

“A man must live, you know.”

But the plea cannot stand. There is no must about it. Where should we have been to-day if all the martyrs had argued that it was more important to live than to do right? Every man has to choose between these two. Many men deem life more important than righteousness; and, like the nautilus, they drop out of sight when storms sweep the sea: they are fair-weather Christians, and are of too soft a stuff to make martyrs. Others reckon that it is not necessary for them to live; but it is necessary for them to do right. They say what Pompey said when his friends besought him not to risk his life upon a tempestuous sea

“It is necessary for me to go;  
it is not necessary for me to live.”

This surely is the logic of faith. A man may be well content to suffer the loss of all things, and to die, if he may keep inviolate the priceless jewels which God has entrusted to his care.

Jacob’s double-dealing appeared to be a success. “**The man increased exceedingly; and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses.**” But that which men call success, and which is sometimes a very superficial and temporary thing, proves nothing as to the rightness or wrongness of a life. It is not by the glitter of gold that God rewards His faithful servants. Many a noble life in the sight of God has been a sad failure, when judged by human standards. And many a failure in the judgment of man has been a royal success in the estimation of the angels.

When a tide of gold has been setting in towards some men, it has been allowed to come as a judgment and a curse, that they might be blinded to destruction. And in many cases, the tide has been restrained, that it might be more possible for the soul to attain to perfect health.

I demur to the common use of the phrase, “Honesty is the best policy”; no doubt, it is so in reality and at the end, though not always in appearance and at the beginning. But if we are simply going to be honest because it pays, we are basing the fabric of our lives on too low a level; and our foundation may give way in days of storm.

We must be honest not because of good policy, but because of good principle; because it is right, and noble, and God-like; yea, because it pleases God. Let us do right; and we shall be happier with scanty means and a good conscience, than those who have all that heart could wish, but are haunted by memories of the means by which their fortunes were acquired memories which, like the ghost of the murdered king, in the immortal drama, arise to mar the merriment of the splendid feast. **“A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.”**

Do not draw a line of separation between the house of God and the house of business.

The counting-house and the shop may be as much the house of God as the holiest shrine, where generations have knelt in prayer. A devout soul will find God everywhere; and will abide with God in every calling in which it is called. If you cannot have the companionship of Jesus in the paths of daily business, by all means abandon them. But if they are at all legitimate, you will find Him at your side, though His presence is veiled from all other eyes.

*Do what you have to do in the name of the Lord Jesus.*

In that name you are wont to pray. In that name learn to do your work. Speak that name over the most menial tasks; and they will glisten with heavenly beauty. Speak it over doubtful things; and their true character will be revealed as the tempter sprang from the toad, when touched by the spear of Ithuriel. Speak it over difficulties; and the iron gates will own the spell, and open to you of their own accord.

*Take the Lord Jesus into your partnership.*

Consult Him before branching out into new directions; or consigning goods to fresh customers; or making large purchases. Let every transaction and every entry be freely open to His eye Let every transaction be laid before Him, for Him to close or open as He will. And be sure to divide with Him the profits, which are His due. A business life, with such sanctions, could never strand on the shoals of bankruptcy.

Above all, realize that you are the servants of Jesus Christ. In the olden days of slavery, a master would sometimes put a trusted slave into a position of great responsibility, where he was permitted even to trade for his owner. But his brains, his muscles, and his gains were all another's. Everything had to be used and accounted for on that one condition. And what are we but the purchased possession of the Son of God? What is our business, but a branch of our stewardship for Him, as it is also a training school for us? What is there we can call our own? It is He that giveth us power to get wealth; and His image and superscription are evident on every coin. **“Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price: wherefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.”**

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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