

THE NEED TO BE MORE

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To the Lord Jesus Christ, for saving me and sustaining me.

To my family, for your love and patience.

*To the friends God has given me along the way, for your wise words
from the Bible.*

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PREFACE

Before you read this book, I want to encourage you to do something simple: open your Bible.

My hope is not that you would merely read what I have written about Jacob, but that you would read what God has written about Jacob. His life is found primarily in Genesis 25 through Genesis 50, and it is one of the most gracious accounts in all of the Bible.

Jacob was not presented to us as a flawless man. He was not a polished hero with no weaknesses, no failures, and no regrets. He was a heel-grabber, a schemer, a deceiver, a hard worker, a fearful man, a grieving father, and eventually, by the grace of God, a worshipper. His story is painfully human, which is why it is so helpful. If we are honest, we can see something of ourselves in him.

That is one reason I love the Bible. It does not flatter men. It tells the truth about them. It shows us their faith and their failure, their victories and their sins, their best moments and their worst ones. Yet above all, it shows us

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the faithfulness of God. Jacob's story is not ultimately about Jacob's greatness. It is about God's mercy toward a man who desperately needed Him.

As you read this book, I encourage you to keep your Bible open. Read the passages for yourself. Mark them, think through them, and pray over them. Ask the Lord to show you not only what happened in Jacob's life, but what He wants to teach you through it.

So before you begin, open your Bible. Read Genesis with fresh eyes. Watch Jacob closely, but look beyond Jacob. Look for the Lord.

He is the true subject of the story.

THE NEED TO BE MORE

Everyone knows, whether they admit it or not, that they need to be more than they are.

They may not say it that way. They may bury the thought under work, ambition, pleasure, religion, family, success, or distraction. Yet, somewhere inside, there is a sense that something is missing. We know we are not righteous enough, not faithful enough, not pure enough, not strong enough, not holy enough, not whole enough. There is a gap between what we are and what we ought to be, and we feel it.

The tragedy is that we keep trying to close that gap with our own hands.

That is Jacob's story. From the womb, he was reaching. He grabbed Esau's heel. He bargained for the birthright, he put on goatskins and pretended to be another man, he fled from the consequences of his own deception, he labored under Laban, schemed with the flocks, feared Esau, and wrestled through the night at Jabbok. Again and again,

Jacob tried to become more by taking more, planning more, working more, manipulating more, or holding on tighter.

But none of it could make him what he needed to be.

That is not just Jacob's story. That is our story. The lost sinner tries to become acceptable to God through religion, morality, good works, baptism, church attendance, sincerity, discipline, or personal reform. The believer, though saved by grace through faith, can still fall into the trap of trying to become what he ought to be through the strength of the flesh. We try to scheme our way into peace, perform our way into acceptance, and labor our way into spiritual maturity.

But a right relationship with God cannot be earned. Righteousness cannot be stolen like a blessing from a blind father. Peace with God cannot be purchased for a bowl of pottage. A new identity cannot be put on like goatskin. The blessing of God cannot be forced by the strength of the flesh.

You must be made new.

That is what Jacob had to learn. He did not become Israel because he finally figured out how to manage life. He became Israel because God met him, wrestled with him, renamed him, preserved him, and redeemed him. Jacob spent years trying to become more by his own effort, but at the end of his life, we see a different man. The hands that once grabbed are now hands of blessing. The person who once schemed for the blessing is now giving blessing by faith. The heel-grabber has become a worshipper.

Before Jacob died, he gathered his sons around his bed and blessed them. Each son received a word from the patriarch.

Some of those words were blessings, some were corrections, and some were prophecies that would shape the history of Israel for centuries to come. The schemer who once stole blessings through deception was now dispensing them with the authority of someone who had walked with God for a lifetime.

This is why Jacob's life is worth studying carefully. His story is not merely a record of family conflict, deception, sorrow, and eventual blessing. It is a mirror. In Jacob, we see the restless human heart trying to become more through its own effort. We see the cost of scheming, the emptiness of pretending, the sorrow of reaping what we have sown, and the mercy of a God who remains faithful even when His people are not.

As we walk through Jacob's life, we will see more than the failures of one man. We will see the patience of God. We will see how the Lord takes a heel-grabber and makes him Israel. We will see that the need to be more cannot be answered by self-improvement, religious performance, or the strength of the flesh.

It can only be answered by the grace of God.

THE HEEL GRABBER

Isaac and Rebekah wanted children. For twenty years, they had none. Isaac prayed, and the Lord answered, and Rebekah conceived twins. During the pregnancy, the children struggled together within her so much that she went to the Lord and asked Him what was happening. The Lord's answer was remarkable.

"And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23).

We are not told whether Rebekah shared these words with Isaac. However, we do know that she remembered them because her actions later in the story only make sense if she believed that the younger son was meant to carry the blessing. Whether she told Jacob about this prophecy, we cannot say for certain, though it seems likely. What we can say is that God had spoken, and His word was sure.

The twins were born. Esau came first, red all over and hairy like a garment. Then came the second boy.

"And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob" (Genesis 25:26).

What a way to enter the world. Most babies arrive with clenched fists or open palms, crying for warmth and comfort. This child arrived gripping his brother's heel. His very first act in life was to reach for someone else's position. They named him Jacob, which means "supplanter," the one who grabs the heel, the one who takes another's place.

Let us consider the family into which these boys were born, because it matters greatly. Their father Isaac was the child of promise, the son God gave to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. Their grandfather Abraham had received the covenant of God, a covenant that included the promise of a great nation, the possession of the land of Canaan, and the blessing of all nations through his seed. This was no ordinary family, and whoever held the birthright held a sacred trust.

By the custom of the day, the birthright belonged to the firstborn. Esau, by a matter of moments, was the firstborn. The birthright was his by natural right.

Yet God had told Rebekah that the elder would serve the younger. The tragedy of Jacob's story is that he and his mother both believed the promise from God, yet neither of them trusted Him to fulfill it. Instead of waiting on the Lord to bring His word to pass in His own time and in His own way, they ran ahead of Him. They schemed, they deceived, and they took matters into their own hands as though God needed their assistance to keep His own word.

If God had already spoken about the outcome, why was Jacob grabbing? If the elder was going to serve the younger according to the word of the Lord, what was there to grab for?

The word of God was clear, so the outcome should have been certain. Jacob's role was simply to trust and to wait. Instead, he grabbed. He came into the world reaching, and he would spend the next several decades reaching. He would reach for the birthright over pottage. He would reach for the blessing in a goatskin disguise. He would reach for wages through clever schemes with spotted cattle.

How much of Jacob's suffering was unnecessary? How many of those years in Haran could have been spent in peace if he had trusted the word God spoke to his mother? We will never know for certain, yet the pattern is unmistakable. Jacob's schemes did not advance the purpose of God. They made his life, by his own later testimony, **"few and evil"** (Genesis 47:9). Those are the words of an old man looking back on a life that was far harder than it needed to be.

Now, it would be easy to read all of this and feel superior to Jacob. It would be easy to say, "Well, if God had spoken a clear promise to *me*, I certainly would have waited." Perhaps. Let us test that thought.

Consider what Jacob had to go on. He had a promise that God spoke to his mother before he was born. He did not hear it himself. He had to take Rebekah's word for it. His faith, such as it was, rested on a secondhand account of something God said to someone else. That is all he had, and he could not even trust that much.

Now consider what we have. We have the completed, written, preserved word of God. Sixty-six books. Every promise God has ever made to His people, recorded in black and white, sitting on our nightstands and in our pockets. We do not have to rely on what someone told us God said. We can read exactly what God said, in His own words, for ourselves. We have, as it says in 2 Peter 1:19, a ***"more sure word of prophecy."***

We have something surer than Jacob ever had. We have something surer than the voice of a mother recounting a vision. We have the completed revelation of the living God. If Jacob should have trusted a promise relayed through Rebekah, how much more should we trust the Bible that God Himself has given and preserved for us?

The Bible tells us plainly what God's will is for the believer:

"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19).

"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2).

"Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9).

God wants us holy. He wants us spreading the gospel. He wants us growing in His word. He wants us faithful. These are not mysteries. They are written in plain language for anyone who will read them. The will of God for the believer is not hidden behind some special revelation that

only certain people receive. It is on the pages of the Bible you already own.

Yet how often do we handle these clear commands the same way Jacob handled the promise given to Rebekah? We know God wants us to be faithful witnesses, so instead of simply being obedient and trusting God with the results, we look for impressive methods or count the number of people we “personally won to the Lord.” We know God wants us to serve, so instead of being faithful in the small place where He has put us, we push and position ourselves for the platform we think we deserve.

Is that not Jacob all over again? Is that not the heel-grabber reaching for something that faithful obedience would have brought in due time?

The Bible is full of encouragement on this point.

"Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass" (Psalm 37:7). Do not fret over the man who seems to get ahead through scheming. That is exactly the opposite of what Jacob did, and it is exactly what God wanted from him.

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6). Jacob leaned on his own understanding his entire early life. He simply could not bring himself to let God handle the how and the when in his life.

There is a particular kind of Christian who is especially prone to Jacob's mistake. It is not the lazy Christian. It is not the indifferent Christian. It is the eager one.

The danger for the eager believer is the same danger Jacob faced. The desire to do something for God can quietly become the habit of doing something ahead of God. The burden for souls can become a justification for methods God never endorsed. The gap between where you are and where you want to be can become so painful that you start grabbing for the next rung of the ladder instead of walking the path God has laid in front of you, one faithful step at a time.

Jacob's hands were clenched from birth. He entered the world gripping, and he would spend years gripping before God finally, lovingly, painfully taught him to let go. The story of that process is the story we are going to walk through together in this book. It is a story of failure and grace, of scheming and mercy, of a man who tried everything he could think of to be more, and a God who waited patiently to show him that "more" was never something he could take. It was something he had to receive.

If you see yourself in Jacob, you are in good company. Most honest believers do. The need to be more is real. The path to getting there begins not with a tighter grip, but with open hands and a willing heart.

"Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

THE POTTAGE

Jacob and Esau grew up. The Bible tells us something important about their temperaments.

"And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents" (Genesis 25:27).

One was a cunning hunter while the other was a plain man. The word ***"plain"*** carries the idea of completeness or simplicity.

Each parent had a favorite. ***"And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob"*** (Genesis 25:28). The favoritism is stated as matter-of-fact as the weather. Isaac preferred Esau whereas Rebekah preferred Jacob. This divided household would become the seedbed for everything that follows.

One day, Esau came in from the field exhausted while Jacob was cooking. The scene is so ordinary it could happen in any kitchen in any century. One brother is

hungry and the other brother has food. What follows is one of the saddest transactions in the Bible.

"And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright" (Genesis 25:30-31).

Notice how quickly Jacob moves. There is no hesitation, no wrestling with his conscience, no pause to consider whether this is the right thing to do. Esau walks through the door hungry, and Jacob instantly sees an opportunity.

Was this the first time Jacob had thought about this? It seems unlikely. This was a man who had been turning the birthright over in his mind, waiting for the right moment, ready with his terms the instant the opportunity presented itself. The heel-grabber was grabbing again.

Esau's response is equally revealing.

"And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?" (Genesis 25:32).

Was he at the point to die? Was Esau truly on the edge of starvation? Almost certainly not. He was tired and hungry after a day of hunting. There was food in the tent. His father had servants and provisions. Esau was not dying. However, he was *uncomfortable*, and he could not tell the difference.

How often do we make the same mistake? How often does temporary discomfort feel like a crisis? The man who skips church because he had a long week is not dying. He is tired. The woman who compromises a conviction because the pressure feels unbearable is not at the point of death.

She is at the point of inconvenience. The believer who abandons a commitment to daily Bible reading because life got busy is not perishing. He is simply choosing the urgent over the important.

Esau could not see past his stomach. The birthright carried the covenant of Abraham and their inheritance. It was worth more than anything Esau would ever hold in his hands, yet he traded it for pottage because he could not endure one afternoon of hunger.

"And Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright" (Genesis 25:34).

Look at all those verbs. He did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way. There is no reflection. No moment of, "What have I done?" Esau consumed the meal and walked away as though nothing of significance had occurred. The brevity of the sentence matches the shallowness of the man. He treated the most valuable thing in his family as though it were less important than lunch.

Thus Esau despised his birthright. The Holy Spirit does not mince words. This was not a moment of weakness. This was contempt. The birthright meant nothing to Esau because Esau lived for the flesh, and the birthright was a spiritual inheritance. A man who lives for what he can see, taste, and feel right now will always trade the eternal for the immediate. He cannot help it. The things of God have no weight to a man whose scale only measures the physical.

Hebrews warns us directly: ***"Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one***

morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (Hebrews 12:16-17).

Notice the word: *afterward*. Esau did *eventually* want the blessing but it was too late. The transaction was complete. The moment had passed. Some things, once traded away for a bowl of beans, do not come back.

Now let us come back to Jacob, because the story condemns him just as surely as it condemns Esau. What did Jacob actually gain from this transaction? He gained a legal claim to the birthright. He could point to the agreement and say, "Esau sold it to me." He had a receipt, so to speak. Technically, the birthright was now his.

Yet there is a world of difference between having a receipt and having a blessing. There is a world of difference between obtaining something through a bargain and receiving it from the hand of God. Jacob had the birthright, legally. He did not have it joyfully. He did not have it peacefully. He did not have it in the way God intended to give it.

This is what happens when we run ahead of God. We may even, sometimes, get what we are reaching for. We may be able to justify it to ourselves and to others. The paperwork may check out. What we will not have is the sweetness that comes when God brings something to pass in His own time and in His own way. A blessing seized is not the same as a blessing received.

"The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10:22).

When God gives a blessing, it comes clean. It comes without guilt, without manipulation, without the nagging knowledge that you got it by exploiting someone else's weakness. Notice that ***"he addeth no sorrow with it."*** Jacob's birthright came with sorrow. It came with the knowledge that his brother was cheated on a bad day. It came with the awareness that he had used pottage to purchase a covenant.

Are there things in our lives that we obtained the wrong way? Opportunities we seized through clever timing rather than patient faith? If so, we may find, as Jacob found, that the thing itself is less satisfying than we imagined, because the method of obtaining it stole the joy right out of it.

The need to be more cannot be met at the bargaining table. It cannot be purchased with a pot of beans. The birthright was coming to Jacob. God had said so. The only thing Jacob's scheme accomplished was to add guilt to what grace would have given freely.

THE GOATSKIN

Isaac was old and his eyes were dim. He believed he was near death, though he would actually live for many more years. He called Esau and asked him to go hunting, prepare a savory meal, and bring it to him so that he could bestow the patriarchal blessing before he died.

"And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son" (Genesis 27:5).

Rebekah heard her husband preparing to give the blessing to Esau, and she panicked. Never mind that God had promised the blessing would go to Jacob. Never mind that God's word had never failed. Rebekah heard Isaac making plans that contradicted what God had told her, and instead of praying, instead of trusting, instead of waiting to see how God would work it out, she began to scheme.

Is there not a lesson here before we even get to Jacob? How quickly we move from hearing a troubling report to taking matters into our own hands. How easily we forget every promise God has ever made the moment the circumstances

seem to be going the wrong direction. Rebekah had a word from God: the elder shall serve the younger. She believed that word. However, she simply did not believe God was capable of keeping it without her help.

Her plan was elaborate. Jacob would bring two goats and she would prepare the meal Isaac wanted. Jacob would wear Esau's clothes to carry his brother's scent. He would put the goatskins on his hands and on his neck to imitate Esau's hairiness. He would walk into his father's tent and lie.

Jacob's objection is telling. ***"And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man: My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing"*** (Genesis 27:11-12).

Read that objection carefully. Jacob did not say, "Mother, this is wrong. We should not deceive my father." He said, "I might get caught." His concern was not the morality of the act but the risk. He was perfectly willing to deceive his blind father. He simply wanted to make sure it would work first.

How familiar that reasoning is. The question we ask ourselves when temptation presents itself is rarely, "Is this right?" Far more often it is, "Can I get away with this?" The sin is already decided. The only remaining question is the probability of being discovered. Jacob had already agreed to the deception in his heart. His only hesitation was practical, not moral.

So Jacob put on the goatskin. He put on his brother's clothes. He carried a meal he did not prepare from an

animal he did not hunt to a father he was about to deceive. When Isaac asked, ***"Who art thou, my son?"*** Jacob answered with a direct lie: ***"I am Esau thy firstborn; I have done according as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me"*** (Genesis 27:19).

"I am Esau." Consider what those words mean. Jacob stood in his father's tent, wearing another man's clothes and another man's skin, and denied his own identity. He said, "I am not Jacob. I am not the man you see before you. I am someone else entirely." He erased himself in order to receive the blessing.

There is an important question in this for every believer. How many of us have done the same thing, not with goatskins, but with carefully constructed versions of ourselves that we present in order to be accepted? The man who talks differently at church than he does at home. The woman who presents a picture of her family on social media that bears little resemblance to reality. The teenager who acts one way around his youth group and another way entirely around his school friends. The pastor who preaches standards on Sunday that he does not keep on Monday.

These are all goatskins. They are disguises we wear because we believe, somewhere deep down, that who we really are is not enough. If people saw the real me, we think, they would not approve. If God dealt with the real me, we fear, He would not bless. So we put on the performance. We dress up as someone we are not and hope that nobody feels our hands too closely.

Isaac was suspicious. ***"And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my***

son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not" (Genesis 27:21). The old man reached out and touched the goatskin on Jacob's hands and said: ***"The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau"*** (Genesis 27:22).

Isaac knew something was wrong. His ears told him one thing but his hands told him another. He chose to trust his hands, and Jacob walked away with the blessing. The deception worked and the goatskin had fooled a blind man.

The goatskin could fool a blind man, but it could not fool God, and the covering could not prevent the consequences.

"And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father" (Genesis 27:34).

Esau, for all his faults, was a man who had just been robbed by his own brother (and mother) in his own father's tent. His grief was raw and real. Whatever we think of Esau's earlier contempt for the birthright, the pain in this verse is unmistakable. He had been cheated and cried with a ***"great and exceeding bitter cry."***

Then came the threat: ***"And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob"*** (Genesis 27:41).

The goatskin gained Jacob a blessing but it cost him his home. Unlike a true blessing from the Lord where He adds no sorrow with it, the blessing Jacob forced upon himself would have plenty of sorrow with it. Rebekah sent Jacob

away to Haran to escape Esau's wrath, and she would die before he returned. The mother who designed the deception never saw her favorite son again. The blessing came, and so did the bill.

Every sin has a price. It may not come due immediately. We may walk away from the tent with the blessing in our pocket and think we got away with it, but give it time. ***"Be sure your sin will find you out"*** (Numbers 32:23). Jacob's sin found him out in his brother's rage, in his mother's death, in twenty years of exile, and in a father-in-law who would repay his deception with deception of his own.

The need to be more is never met by becoming someone else. It is never met by putting on a disguise. God blesses honesty, brokenness, and surrender. He blesses the person who comes to Him as they actually are and says, "This is who I am, Lord. I am not Esau. I am Jacob. I am a mess. I need you to make me more, because I cannot make myself into something I am not."

Jacob would learn this lesson. It would take a wrestling match, a dislocated hip, and a new name, all of which are coming. For now, the heel-grabber has become the impersonator, and the consequences are already in motion.

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

THE PILLOW OF STONE

Jacob is running.

His mother has sent him away. He is heading toward Haran, toward his uncle Laban, toward a future he cannot see and a past he cannot undo.

"And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep"
(Genesis 28:11).

A stone for a pillow. A few days earlier, Jacob was in his father's tent collecting a blessing that would make him the head of the covenant family. Now he is sleeping in an open field with a rock under his head. The distance between the stolen blessing and the stone pillow was remarkably short. Sin always promises more than it delivers, and the bill always arrives sooner than we expect.

It is in this condition, alone and fugitive, sleeping in the dirt, that God chooses to appear to Jacob for the first time.

"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, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed" (Genesis 28:12-13).

What a picture. A ladder set up on the earth, reaching all the way to heaven. Angels ascending and descending upon it. The Lord Himself standing above it, speaking directly to a fugitive who had done nothing to deserve a single word from God.

Consider what the ladder reveals. It shows the distance between earth and heaven, between sinful man and holy God. That distance is immense. Jacob was lying in the dirt with a guilty conscience, and God was standing above a ladder that stretched beyond sight. The gulf between them was infinite. Jacob could not have climbed that ladder in a thousand lifetimes. He could not have built it. He could not have earned his way to the top of it. The ladder was there because God put it there, and the angels were moving on it because God sent them. The entire vision was a picture of grace bridging a gap that man could never bridge on his own.

The Lord Jesus made this connection Himself when He said to Nathanael, ***"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man"*** (John 1:51). Christ is the ladder. He is the bridge between sinful man and holy God. Jacob saw the ladder in

a dream but we see it fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, who came down from heaven to earth so that sinful men could be reconciled to a holy God. Not through religious effort, not through good works, not through climbing, but through Him.

The promises God made to Jacob that night were staggering. ***"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"*** (Genesis 28:15).

(1) I am with thee. (2) I will keep thee. (3) I will bring thee again. (4) I will not leave thee. Four promises freely given to a fugitive who had done nothing to earn any of them. Jacob's reaction when he awoke tells us a great deal about where he was spiritually.

"And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Genesis 28:16-17).

Jacob was completely unprepared for this encounter. He did not expect to meet God on a barren hillside in the middle of the night. Had he known God was in that place, he likely would not have gone there at all. The memory of his sins made him afraid to face the Almighty. He may have felt he should have prepared, should have brought an offering, should have done something to make himself presentable before the Lord. Instead, God met him exactly as he was: a sinner with a stone pillow and a guilty heart.

The word **"dreadful"** does not mean terrible in the way we use the word today. It means awe-inspiring, fear-inducing, overwhelming. Jacob was not repelled by God. He was overwhelmed by Him. He had suddenly become aware of the holiness of the God he had offended, and the awareness shook him to his core. This is always the proper response to an encounter with the living God. Isaiah felt it when he saw the Lord high and lifted up and cried, **"Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips"** (Isaiah 6:5). Peter felt it when he fell at Jesus' knees and said, **"Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord"** (Luke 5:8). When a sinner truly sees God, the first response is not comfort but holy fear.

Yet Jacob did not run. He was afraid, yet he was drawn. The ladder terrified him because it showed the gulf between his soul and God's holiness. The ladder also gave him hope because it showed that God had provided a way across that gulf.

Jacob took the stone he had used as a pillow and set it up as a memorial pillar. He poured oil on it and renamed the place Bethel, which means "house of God." These were the instinctive responses of a man who had been genuinely touched by God. He memorialized the spot, anointed it, and gave it a name that would preserve the memory. All of these were right and proper.

Then he made a vow, and the vow reveals where he truly was in his walk with God.

"And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: And this

stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee" (Genesis 28:20-22).

God had just given Jacob four unconditional promises, yet Jacob responded with conditions. God said, "I will." Jacob said, "*If* you will, *then* I will."

It would be easy to be harsh with Jacob here, yet we should also be fair. Many new believers come to God the same way. They come with conditions. "Lord, if you fix my problems, I will serve you." "Lord, if you bless my business, I will give to the church." "Lord, if you answer this prayer, I will start reading my Bible." These are not prayers of mature faith. They are the prayers of spiritual infants who are still learning that God is not a business partner. He is a Father, and His blessings are not contingent on our ability to hold up our end of a contract.

Here is the beautiful thing about this chapter when you see it in light of the whole story. At Bethel, the young Jacob said, "***If God will...***" At the end of his life, the aged Israel said something very different. "***And Israel said unto Joseph, God shall...***" (Genesis 48:21, paraphrased). The "***if***" of Bethel became the "***God shall***" of the deathbed. The conditional faith of the young man became the certain faith of the old patriarch. It took a lifetime to get there. It took Haran, and Laban, and the wrong bride, and the midnight wrestling, and the limp, and the buried idols. Every chapter of Jacob's life was God patiently, persistently, lovingly moving him from "***if***" to "***shall***."

If you are at Bethel right now, if your faith is still conditional, if you are still negotiating with God about the terms of your obedience, do not despair. The faith you have

today, however small, however mixed with self-interest, is a seed that God is willing to water and grow. Bring it to Him and ask for His help with your unbelief. Request of the Lord, like the father in Mark 9:24, ***“And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”***

THE WRONG BRIDE

Jacob arrived in Haran and met Rachel at a well. The text says he rolled the stone from the well's mouth by himself, a task that ordinarily required several shepherds, and then he kissed Rachel and wept. He made an agreement with Laban, Rachel's father: seven years of labor for her hand in marriage. The Bible describes those seven years with one of the most beautiful sentences in all of the Bible.

"And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her" (Genesis 29:20).

Seven years that felt like days. That is what genuine love does. It transforms labor into devotion. For once in his life, Jacob was doing something honestly, openly, with no deception involved. He was not scheming for Rachel. He was working for her, year after year, in plain sight, honoring the agreement he had made with her father. This may be the most admirable period in Jacob's early life.

Then came the wedding night.

"And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?" (Genesis 29:25).

Behold, it was Leah. Three words that must have knocked the wind out of Jacob's chest. Seven years of labor and waiting, then he wakes up next to the wrong woman.

"Wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?" What a question for Jacob to ask. The deceiver has been deceived. One could imagine, a similar question could have been asked of Jacob. The man who dressed in goatskins to fool a blind father has been fooled by a father-in-law who dressed one daughter as another in the darkness of a wedding tent. The symmetry is devastating, and it is no accident.

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

This principle runs through all of the Bible, and it runs through Jacob's life like a river. He deceived his father using a disguise. He was deceived by Laban using a disguise. He exploited the darkness of Isaac's blindness while Laban exploited the darkness of the wedding tent. He pretended to be someone he was not and Leah was presented as someone she was not.

Laban's justification for the switch shows just how much Jacob had sown what he had just reaped.

"And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn" (Genesis 29:26).

Notice the phrase: ***to give the younger before the first-born.*** Can you imagine what those words must have done to Jacob? His entire scheme back in Canaan had been about the younger taking the place of the firstborn. He had stolen Esau's blessing precisely by putting the younger before the elder. Now Laban throws the same principle back in his face, using it as the justification for cheating him. The man who violated the order of the firstborn is now the victim of a man who insists on honoring it. Whether Laban intended the irony or not, the sting of it must have been unbearable.

There is a deeper lesson here that goes beyond the law of sowing and reaping. Jacob did everything right for those seven years. He worked honestly. He honored his commitment. He loved Rachel genuinely. For once, he was not scheming. Yet he still did not get what he worked for. He did everything right, and he still woke up next to the wrong woman.

How is that fair? It is not. That is the point. The consequences of past sin do not evaporate because present behavior improves. Jacob's seven years of faithful labor did not erase the goatskin. The seeds he planted in his father's tent were still producing a harvest in Haran. Good behavior in the present does not cancel the debt of sin in the past. Only grace can do that.

This is a hard truth, yet it is an honest one. Some of us are living in the aftermath of decisions we made years ago. We have repented. We have changed our ways. We are walking faithfully now. Yet the consequences of the old sin keep showing up uninvited, like weeds from seeds we planted in a former season. The wrong bride keeps appearing in our lives, not because God is cruel, but because the law of the

harvest is real and it does not make exceptions for good intentions.

What then? Do we despair? Do we give up and go back to scheming? No. We do what Jacob eventually did. We keep walking. We keep serving. We accept the consequences with humility and trust that God, who is rich in mercy, can use even the painful harvest to shape us into something better than what we were.

THE HOUSE DIVIDED

After Laban deceived him, Jacob worked another seven years to be able to marry Rachel. Jacob now had two wives, and the household was at war from the beginning. The two sisters competed for Jacob's affection through the only means available to them in the ancient world: children.

"And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren" (Genesis 29:31).

The LORD saw that Leah was hated. Let those words sink in. God saw the pain of a woman who had been given to a man who did not want her. She was the wrong bride, the one Jacob never chose, the one who woke up every morning knowing that her husband's heart belonged to her sister. God saw that pain, and He responded by giving her children.

Leah bore Reuben, and the name she gave him reveals her anguish: ***"Surely the LORD hath looked upon my***

affliction; now therefore my husband will love me" (Genesis 29:32). She named her child after her suffering. She was hoping that a son would finally make Jacob love her.

Then came Simeon: ***"Because the LORD hath heard that I was hated, he hath therefore given me this son also"*** (Genesis 29:33).

Then Levi: ***"Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons"*** (Genesis 29:34).

Then came Judah. ***"She conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, Now will I praise the LORD: therefore she called his name Judah"*** (Genesis 29:35). It is worth noting that the Messianic line would run through Judah. It would run through Judah, the son of the unloved wife, the son whose name means "Praise." God chose the despised woman's child to carry the promise. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, came through the line of a woman who was not preferred by her husband.

Rachel, meanwhile, was consumed with envy.

"And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die" (Genesis 30:1).

The desperation in Rachel's voice is heartbreaking, yet it is also revealing. She had what Leah wanted: Jacob's love. She was the chosen wife, the desired one, the one he had worked fourteen years to marry. She had his heart, but she did not have his children, and the lack was destroying her.

"And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?" (Genesis 30:2). Am I in God's stead? Finally, Jacob said something true and important. He could not open Rachel's womb. Children are a gift from the Lord.

What followed was a painful competition. Rachel gave Jacob her handmaid Bilhah. Leah gave Jacob her handmaid Zilpah. Children were born to both handmaids, and each wife claimed the children as her own victory in the ongoing war for Jacob's favor. The names tell the story: Dan (***"God hath judged me"***), Naphtali (***"with great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister"***), Gad (***"a troop cometh"***), Asher (***"happy am I"***). Every child was a battle cry in a war that nobody was winning.

This is what a divided house looks like. This is the fruit of deception, favoritism, and a marriage built on manipulation rather than trust. ***"If a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand"*** (Mark 3:25). Jacob's house was divided from the beginning. Two wives who despised each other, children born not out of joy but out of competition, and a father whose affection was given to one woman and withheld from another. It was a household at war, and the casualties would multiply for generations.

Eventually, God remembered Rachel. ***"And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach"*** (Genesis 30:22-23). She named him Joseph, meaning ***"he shall add,"*** and she immediately asked for another. Even in her joy, there was the restless longing for more.

Jacob now had the children that would become the heads of the tribes of Israel, but the scene in which they were born was not peaceful. It was not a home full of love, order, and gratitude. It was a home full of envy, insecurity, striving, bitterness, and comparison. That does not mean God was absent. It means God was merciful. God was working in spite of the sin and confusion of the household, not because the household was healthy.

There is a great warning here. A person can be blessed by God in one area of life while still suffering the consequences of disorder in another. Jacob was the heir of the promise. God had met him at Bethel. God had promised to be with him. Yet Jacob's home was full of trouble. The covenant blessing did not erase the consequences of human choices. God was faithful to His promise, but Jacob still had to live with the fruit of deception, favoritism, and fleshly decisions.

For the believer, the application is pretty clear: do not build your life on comparison. Do not make another person's love, attention, approval, or blessing the measure of your worth. Do not despise what God has given you because He has given something different to someone else.

Most of all, this passage should point us to Christ. Jacob's house was divided, but Christ builds a better house. Jacob's love was partial, but Christ's love is perfect. Leah longed to be loved, and Rachel longed to be fruitful, but in Christ the soul finds what human affection and earthly blessings can never fully provide. ***"To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved"*** (Ephesians 1:6). The believer is not merely tolerated by God, but accepted in the Beloved.

THE SPOTTED LAMBS

After fourteen years of labor for Leah and Rachel, Jacob wanted to go home. Laban, who had grown wealthy from Jacob's work, did not want to lose him. He asked Jacob to name his wages, but Jacob's answer was unusual.

"I will pass through all thy flock to day, removing from thence all the speckled and spotted cattle, and all the brown cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats: and of such shall be my hire" (Genesis 30:32).

Jacob did not ask for the strong animals. He did not request the pure white sheep that would fetch the highest price. Jacob's wages would not be the whole flock, nor even the strongest animals in it. His hire would be the unusual offspring: the spotted, speckled, ringstraked, and brown animals that would be born from that point forward.

These were the off-colored animals that any shrewd herdsman would happily give away, because the majority of the flock would naturally be solid-colored. Laban

agreed immediately, as he thought he was getting the better end of the deal.

Laban, being Laban, then moved quickly to tip the scales even further in his own favor. He removed every spotted and speckled animal from the flock that very day and gave them to his own sons, putting three days' journey between them and Jacob's flock. He left Jacob tending a flock of solid-colored animals, with almost no chance of producing the spotted offspring that would become Jacob's wages.

"And Jacob took him rods of green poplar, and of the hazel and chesnut tree; and pilled white strakes in them, and made the white appear which was in the rods. And he set the rods which he had pilled before the flocks in the gutters in the watering troughs when the flocks came to drink, that they should conceive when they came to drink" (Genesis 30:37-38).

Jacob placed these rods he had made in front of the animals when they came to drink and mate. The animals that bred before the striped rods produced spotted and speckled offspring. Jacob's flock began to grow.

Was this ancient animal husbandry? Was it superstition? Was it a clever scheme? The text itself provides the answer, and the answer is important. The rods were not the cause of Jacob's prosperity. God was.

"And the angel of God spake unto me in a dream, saying, Jacob: And I said, Here am I. And he said, Lift up now thine eyes, and see, all the rams which leap upon the cattle are ringstraked, speckled, and grisled: for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee" (Genesis 31:11-12).

God was the One directing the breeding. God was the One ensuring that the offspring bore the patterns Jacob needed. The rods may have been Jacob's idea, yet the results were God's doing. No farmer today could place striped sticks in front of his animals and expect spotted offspring. That is not how genetics works. It worked for Jacob because God made it work.

This is worth dwelling on, because believers sometimes read stories like this and try to extract a method from them. They see Jacob's rods and think, "If I do what Jacob did, I will get what Jacob got." That is not the lesson. The lesson is that God provides, and He provides in whatever way He chooses. He used rods for Jacob. He used ravens for Elijah. He used a boy's lunch for five thousand. The instrument is never the point, our focus should be on the Provider.

There is a beautiful spiritual picture hidden in these spotted lambs, and it is worth taking the time to see it. When Laban looked at the flock, he saw some animals that were white and some that were spotted. To Laban, the white ones were valuable and the spotted ones were expendable.

He was happy to give the stained animals away.

This is how the world views people. The world looks at humanity and sees some who are respectable, successful, and presentable, and others who are stained, flawed, and undesirable. The world values the white sheep and discards the spotted ones. The clean and the impressive are welcomed, whereas the stained and the broken are pushed to the margins.

Jacob's portion was tied to the spotted ones. He was willing to receive the stained, the off-colored, the imperfect, the ones Laban thought he could afford to lose. Yet God built Jacob's flock from those whom Laban considered worthless.

Is that not what the Lord Jesus did? He came for sinners, those with spots in their coats. He sought out those with stains. The world may look at one sinner and say, "That one is too stained," while looking at another and saying, "That one is clean enough."

But God's word tells the truth about all of us. ***"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"*** (Romans 3:23). Don't we all have at least a *little* spot? Don't we all have something in us that proves we are not as clean as we appear? We all know we've sinned and have spots. Some spots may be more visible than others, but every sinner stands stained before a holy God.

That is why Christ came. He came for the sick, the guilty, the stained, and the helpless. ***"They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"*** (Matthew 9:12-13).

Christ is the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep: stained by sin and unable to cleanse itself. He does not ignore the stain. He does not pretend sin is harmless. He came because the stain was real, because the guilt was real, and because man could never remove it on his own. The sinner does not need a better reputation first. He does not need to become spotless before coming to Christ. He needs the Saviour who alone can wash him clean.

The wonderful truth is that Christ takes the stained and makes them His own. He builds His flock from sinners the world discards, religious men despise, and self-righteous people overlook. He receives the publican, the harlot, the prodigal, the thief, the broken, the ashamed, and the one who knows he has nothing to offer but his need. Now, if we are honest, that is all of us. We may not all have the same stains, but we have all sinned. We have all come short. We all need the same Shepherd, the same gospel, the same mercy, and the same salvation.

Jacob also did something practical with his growing flock that carries a lesson for parents and pastors. He separated his lambs from Laban's flock.

"And Jacob did separate the lambs, and set the faces of the flocks toward the ringstraked, and all the brown in the flock of Laban; and he put his own flocks by themselves, and put them not unto Laban's cattle" (Genesis 30:40).

He set his own flocks apart. He did not allow his lambs to mingle freely with Laban's animals. Jacob understood that what belonged to him needed to be watched, guided, and kept distinct from Laban's flock. In the immediate sense, this was wise stewardship over his wages. In application, it reminds us that the lambs entrusted to us must not be left carelessly under every influence.

Every parent, every pastor, every Sunday school teacher, every youth leader has the same responsibility. The lambs in our care must be protected from evil associations that would corrupt them. This means being intentional about who influences them, what they are exposed to, and where they spend their time. Jacob kept his lambs separate from

Laban's to keep better track of them, yes, but also to take better care of them.

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

The spotted lambs chapter in Jacob's life is easy to rush past on the way to the wrestling and the new name. However, it deserves a longer look. In it, we see God's provision overruling human scheming. We see the faithfulness of a God who said, ***"I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee,"*** and who worked behind the scenes to prosper the man that the world was trying to cheat.

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1).

TWENTY YEARS

Jacob had worked fourteen years for two wives and then continued six more years for flocks. Twenty years under the roof of a man who changed his wages ten times and exploited every advantage. Twenty years of backbreaking labor in the heat and the frost, of sleepless nights guarding the flocks, of being cheated by the very man he was enriching.

"Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times" (Genesis 31:41).

When Jacob finally made this speech to Laban at the end of his time in Haran, there was a weariness in his words that twenty years of labor had earned. He recounted the terms. Every number a testament to the toll that Laban's dishonesty had taken on his life.

"In the day the drought consumed me, and the

frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes" (Genesis 31:40).

This is the life of a man who is trying to earn his way forward through sheer effort. He may have been the hardest-working man in Haran. He poured himself out for Laban's household with a diligence that should have produced wealth, freedom, and respect.

It produced none of those things. Laban kept changing the rules. Every time Jacob gained ground, Laban moved the line. The system was rigged, and no amount of effort could fix it.

There is something God does with self-reliant people that is painful to experience and essential to understand. He allows them to exhaust their own resources. He places them in situations where their strength, their cleverness, and their determination are simply not enough. He does this not because He enjoys watching them struggle, but because they will never learn to lean on Him as long as they are trying so forcefully to stand on their own.

The apostle Paul described a similar experience: ***"For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead"*** (2 Corinthians 1:8-9).

God was not punishing Paul. He was teaching Paul. He was teaching him, through suffering, that self-trust is a dead end and that the only reliable foundation for a life of service is total dependence on God.

Jacob was learning the same lesson in Haran, though he was learning it slowly. Twenty years is a long time. Twenty years of hard labor, unfair treatment, and constant frustration is enough to break most men.

Have you been in Haran? Have you been in a season where you are doing everything you know to do, working harder than you have ever worked, and still not getting ahead? Have you been under an authority that is unfair, in circumstances that make no sense, in a system that seems designed to keep you from the very thing you are laboring for? If so, take comfort. God sees. He is not indifferent. He is patient.

"And the angel of God spake unto me in a dream, saying, Jacob: And I said, Here am I. And he said, Lift up now thine eyes, and see, all the rams which leap upon the cattle are ringstraked, speckled, and grised: for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee" (Genesis 31:11-12).

God was watching. He was working behind the scenes, prospering Jacob in spite of Laban's schemes, preparing the day when He would say to Jacob that it was time to go home.

"And the LORD said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee" (Genesis 31:3).

The freedom that Jacob had spent twenty years trying to earn through labor was given to him in a single sentence from God. One word from the Lord, and the long night in Haran was over.

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

THE WRESTLING

Jacob is heading home. Twenty years in Haran are behind him. He has wives, children, flocks, and servants. By any outward measure, he is a prosperous man. He should be triumphant.

Yet he is fearful. Esau is coming to meet him with four hundred men. Jacob does not know if his brother is coming for reconciliation or for revenge. The last words he heard from Esau, twenty years ago, were a vow to kill him. Twenty years have passed, but fear has a long memory.

Jacob does what Jacob always does. He schemes. He divides his company into two bands, reasoning that if Esau destroys one, the other might escape. He sends wave after wave of gifts ahead of him, herds of goats, sheep, camels, cattle, and donkeys, hoping to appease his brother's anger before they meet face to face. Then, the night before the encounter, he sends everyone and everything across the brook Jabbok.

"And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day" (Genesis 32:24).

For twenty years, Jacob had been surrounded by people, by work, by the constant noise of a large household. Now, on the night that would change his life, everything had been stripped away. He was alone with God.

The ***"man"*** who wrestled with Jacob was no ordinary man. Hosea tells us: ***"Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us"*** (Hosea 12:4). This was an appearance of God in human form. The God of the universe stepped into the darkness at Jabbok and laid hold of Jacob.

Notice who initiated the wrestling. Jacob did not seek this fight. He did not challenge God to a match. God came to him. God took hold of him. God started it. This was not Jacob wrestling with God for a blessing. This was God wrestling with Jacob to break his self-reliance.

They wrestled all night. Hour after hour, through the darkness. Jacob held on with everything he had. The old tenacity, the old grip, the heel-grabbing instinct that had defined him from birth, was fully engaged. He would not let go because Esau was coming in the morning, and if God did not bless him, he had nothing.

Then God touched his thigh.

"And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him" (Genesis 32:25).

One touch was all it took. The God who had wrestled all night without prevailing could have ended the match at any moment. He could have spoken a word and Jacob would have been dust. He chose to wrestle. He chose to let Jacob strain against Him through the long hours of the night. He chose to let Jacob exhaust every last ounce of his own strength. Then, when Jacob had nothing left, God touched the hollow of his thigh and took away his ability to stand on his own.

"And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Genesis 32:26).

"I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." This is the turning point. This is the moment everything changes. For the first time in his life, Jacob is asking for a blessing instead of stealing one. He is not wearing a disguise. He is not making a deal. He is not exploiting someone's weakness. He is broken, hanging on with his arms because his legs no longer work, and he is begging God for something he knows he cannot obtain any other way.

God's response was a question: ***"What is thy name?"*** (Genesis 32:27).

God knew Jacob's name. He was not asking for information. He was asking for confession. The last time Jacob was asked to identify himself, he lied. Isaac asked, ***"Who art thou?"*** and Jacob answered, ***"I am Esau."*** Now God asks the same question, and this time, Jacob tells the truth: ***"Jacob."***

"And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power

with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Genesis 32:28).

Israel. A name Jacob never earned, never bought, never stole, and never could have invented for himself. God took the name of a schemer and replaced it with the name of a prince. He took a broken man hanging on in the darkness and called him royalty.

This is the heart of the gospel applied to a life. You do not become more by trying harder. You become more by being broken. You do not earn a new identity. You receive one. You do not climb the ladder to God. God comes down the ladder to you. You do not wrestle your way into a blessing. You cling to the God who broke you until He gives you what only He can give.

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:25).

Jacob lost his strength at Peniel but found his name. He lost his ability to stand but gained a blessing no amount of standing could have earned. The midnight wrestling was the most painful experience of his life. It was also the most transformative. The need to be more was finally met, and it was met in the last way Jacob would have expected: by becoming less and letting God do the work.

THE REUNION

"And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh" (Genesis 32:31).

The sun rose, and Jacob limped. Every step from this morning forward would remind him of the night God touched his thigh, took away his self-reliance, and gave him a new name.

Any man who truly encounters God should have his walk changed. It won't always be as physical as Jacob's walk was changed, but the way we walked before should not be the way we walk after we encounter the Lord Jesus Christ.

"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). The Christian life is described throughout the Bible as a walk, and those who have met God, wrestled with Him, and are saved by Him do not walk the way they used to. Something has changed, something has been touched. The old stride is gone, the old confidence in the flesh is gone.

What replaces it is a dependence on God that shows up in every step.

Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming with his four hundred men. The moment he had dreaded for twenty years was here. He arranged his family behind him, with the handmaids and their children first, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. Then he went ahead of them all.

"And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept" (Genesis 33:3-4).

Esau ran to Jacob, threw his arms around him, fell on his neck, and kissed him. The deceiver and the one he had deceived, the schemer and the brother he had cheated, were both weeping together.

Jacob did not come to Esau as the same man who had fled from him. He had left home as a schemer, pretending to be someone he was not. Yet, he returned as a limping man, bowed low before his brother. That is a different Jacob. He was not hiding behind disguise anymore. He was not trying to steal anything, nor was he pretending. He came openly, humbly, and honestly.

There is a practical lesson here for every believer. When you have wronged someone, do not dress yourself up in excuses.

The Bible says, ***"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men"*** (Romans 12:18). Those words are important. ***"If it be possible"*** reminds us that reconciliation is not always entirely in our control.

We cannot force another person to forgive or to receive us. We cannot force a broken relationship to become what it once was. However, the phrase ***“as much as lieth in you”*** reminds us that we are still responsible for our own part. We can humble ourselves, confess wrong, seek peace, and stop running.

Jacob could not control Esau’s response, but he could control how he approached him. He could come proud, or he could come bowed down. He could come defensive, or he could come honestly. He could come as the old Jacob, or he could come as a man who had been touched by God. The limp on Jacob’s body matched the humility that ought to have been in his heart.

This is one evidence of a changed walk: a man who has met God should not handle conflict the same way he used to. Before, Jacob’s way was deception. Now, he comes in humility. Before, he hid behind his mother’s plan and his father’s blindness. Now, he walks forward in the open. Before, he took advantage of weakness. Now, he bows himself to the ground.

Esau’s embrace is a mercy in the story, but Jacob’s humility is the application we must not miss. In this passage, we are shown a man who could no longer avoid the consequences of his past and had to face his brother as a changed man. That is a situation where many Christians can find ourselves in. We cannot control what someone else does with our apology, but we can make sure our apology is honest. We cannot control whether someone else embraces us, but we can make sure we are not still walking in the old deception.

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9). Peace-

makers are not people who pretend there was never a problem. They are not people who cover sin with shallow words. True peacemaking requires truth, humility, and courage. Jacob had to face the brother he wronged. He had to walk toward the very thing he feared. He had to come without disguise and without deceit.

So let the changed walk show up in real life. Let it show up in your home. Let it show up in your apologies. Let it show up in your relationships. Let it show up when you have to face someone you wronged. Let it show up when pride tells you to hide, defend, or delay.

SHECHEM

After the reconciliation with Esau, Jacob had the opportunity to follow his brother to Seir. Esau offered but Jacob declined, saying his children were tender and his flocks were nursing. Instead, he settled near Shechem.

"And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padanaram; and pitched his tent before the city" (Genesis 33:18).

He pitched his tent before the city. Close enough to do business with the people of Shechem and for his family to mingle with the Canaanites.

The consequences of settling here were catastrophic.

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

Dinah went out to see the daughters of the land. She was going out to see what the Canaanite girls were doing, to

seek their fellowship, or to satisfy a curiosity about the world just beyond her father's tent. It was an act of innocent but ill-advised curiosity, and it was made possible by her father's decision to camp so close to the city in the first place.

Where were Jacob and Leah? Why was their daughter wandering into a Canaanite city unaccompanied? The moral tone of Jacob's household had been lowered by years of deception, rivalry, and compromise. The parents who should have been protecting their daughter were apparently unaware of the danger, or unwilling to address it.

"And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her" (Genesis 34:2).

Shechem saw Dinah as she was visiting the daughters of the land. He saw her, he took her, and he defiled her. The progression is familiar, as it is the same pattern we see in the Garden of Eden. Eve saw the fruit, she took it, and she ate it. David saw Bathsheba, he sent for her, and he sinned. The lust of the eyes leads to the act of the flesh. ***"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world"*** (1 John 2:16).

Shechem had defiled Dinah and, when the news reached her brothers, they were grieved and furious.

"And the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father deceitfully, and said, because he had defiled Dinah their sister" (Genesis 34:13).

Notice that the sons of Jacob answered ***deceitfully***. They had learned the family trade. They told Hamor and

Shechem that intermarriage between the two peoples was possible, on one condition: every male in Shechem must be circumcised.

Think about what they did. They took the marking of God's covenant, the sacred sign that God had given to Abraham as a mark of His people, and they used it as a weapon. They offered the sign of the covenant not in faith, but in treachery. The sign that was meant to set God's people apart was used to set up a massacre.

The Shechemites agreed, though not out of any spiritual conviction. Hamor and Shechem appealed to their fellow citizens with a carnal argument: ***"Shall not their cattle and their substance and every beast of theirs be ours?"*** (Genesis 34:23). The Shechemites submitted to circumcision not because they wanted to serve the God of Israel, but because they wanted to possess the wealth of Israel. Their motive was greed, and the brothers' motive was revenge. There was no righteousness on either side of this transaction.

On the third day, when the men of the city were at the peak of their pain, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's full brothers through Leah, entered the city with swords and slaughtered every male.

"And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out" (Genesis 34:26).

Then the rest of Jacob's sons came and plundered the city. They took the flocks, the herds, the donkeys, the wealth, the women, and the children. The city was stripped bare. What began as a father's poor decision to camp too close to a pagan city ended in a bloodbath.

"And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house" (Genesis 34:30).

Read the pronouns in this. ***Me. Me. I. Me. My.*** Jacob's response was entirely about himself. He was not outraged by the sin committed against Dinah. He was not grieved by the wickedness of his sons. He was not broken by the misuse of God's covenant sign. He was afraid for his own safety and worried about his reputation among the neighbors. The man who had been renamed Prince with God was cowering like a man who had no God at all.

His sons' reply was blunt: ***"Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?"*** (Genesis 34:31). It is a fair question, and it went unanswered. Jacob had no response, he simply had nothing to say.

The lesson here is painful. When a father fails to lead his household with moral clarity, the children will take matters into their own hands, and the results will be ugly. Simeon and Levi were wrong in what they did. Their anger was justified but the methods they let rage lead them into were wicked. Yet Jacob's failure to act, to protect, to lead with righteousness, left a vacuum that his sons filled with violence.

Simeon and Levi were not wrong to care about their sister. They were not wrong to be angry that she had been defiled. Some things ought to make a man angry but anger, even when it begins with a righteous cause, can quickly become sinful when it is not submitted to God. ***"Be ye***

angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26). Their anger began with the dishonor done to Dinah, but it ended in deception, murder, and plunder.

This is one of the great warnings of Genesis 34. A right cause does not justify wicked methods. Simeon and Levi could point to the sin of Shechem, but pointing to another man's sin did not excuse their own. They used deceit. They profaned the sign of the covenant. They murdered men who were weakened and unsuspecting. Then the rest of the sons joined in and spoiled the city.

The chapter ends without a noble speech from Jacob. It ends with the question of his sons still hanging in the air: **“Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?”** (Genesis 34:31). They asked a true question, but they had answered it in a sinful way. Jacob had failed to answer it at all. That is the tragedy of the chapter: one side had passion without righteousness, while the other had concern without courage.

Later, near the end of his life, Jacob would remember this day. He would say of Simeon and Levi, **“instruments of cruelty are in their habitations”** (Genesis 49:5). He said, **“Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel”** (Genesis 49:7). Time did not make their actions righteous. Old age did not cause Jacob to look back and say they had done well. Their wrath was still cruel.

That is important. Genesis 34 records what happened, but Genesis 49 helps us know how to judge it. Dinah was wronged. Shechem sinned. Jacob failed. Simeon and Levi acted wickedly. The Shechemites were greedy. The whole

chapter is a dark scene of lust, compromise, silence, deceit, revenge, and fear. It is not a chapter with clean heroes. It is a chapter that shows what happens when a home is too close to the world and too far from godly order.

THE BURIED IDOLS

After the disaster at Shechem, God spoke to Jacob again.

"And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother" (Genesis 35:1).

Jacob was to return to the place where God first spoke to him. It had been nearly thirty years since that night. Jacob's response is the most decisive spiritual act of his life.

"Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: And let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went" (Genesis 35:2-3).

Jacob gives three commands here. Jacob was not going back to Bethel carrying the baggage of Shechem. He was not going to stand before the altar of God with pagan idols

tucked away in his saddlebags. If he was returning to the place where God had spoken to him, he was going to come clean.

"And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem" (Genesis 35:4).

They gave them up. The idols, the earrings, the objects of foreign worship were handed over and buried under an oak tree.

Every believer must be on guard against strange gods. They may not be carved images. They may be habits, attitudes, relationships, entertainments, or ambitions that have no place in the life of someone who bears the name of Christian. They are the things we picked up during our time in Haran, the things that crept in while we were busy with other matters, the things that now sit comfortably in our tents as though they belong there. They do not belong there and they never did.

There is a lesson here for the home. Jacob finally did what he should have done long before. He spoke to his household, gave spiritual direction, and drew a line. After years of passivity, fear, favoritism, and confusion, Jacob stood up and led.

That is one of the greatest needs in any home. Somebody must be willing to say, "We are not carrying this any farther. We are not taking these idols to Bethel. We are not making room for these things in this house anymore. We are going back to God." A father must not wait until Shechem has already done its damage before he becomes

serious about holiness. However, if he has already waited too long, he should not wait another day.

The command of God was simple: ***“Arise, go up to Bethel.”*** The word ***“arise”*** is fitting. Jacob had been sitting too long in the wrong place. He had pitched his tent before Shechem, and sorrow followed. Now God calls him to get up. There are times when the most spiritual thing a man can do is arise. Stop sitting in compromise, stop dwelling in the place God never intended you to stay, and stop letting the disaster of yesterday keep you from obeying God today.

Notice also that God identified Himself as the One ***“that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.”*** God reminded Jacob of his beginning. Bethel was the place where Jacob had slept with a stone for his pillow. He had left home afraid, lonely, and guilty. Yet God met him there and promised to be with him, keep him, bring him again into the land, and not leave him until He had done that which He had spoken.

Now, years later, God calls Jacob back to that place. Jacob’s family had grown, his flocks had multiplied, and his sorrows had increased, but the God of Bethel had not changed. The God who met Jacob when he was running away was still the God calling him back.

“And 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” (Genesis 35:5).

Jacob had feared that the Canaanites and Perizzites would gather together and destroy him and his house. He had looked at the situation through the eyes of fear. However,

when he obeyed God, the terror of God fell upon the surrounding cities, and they did not pursue him. The thing Jacob feared did not overtake him because God protected him.

How often we are paralyzed by fears that obedience would have answered. Jacob was afraid to move, afraid of the people around him, afraid of the consequences of his sons' actions. However, God did not call Jacob to calculate every possible danger but instead called him to arise and go to Bethel. When Jacob obeyed, God handled the danger.

That does not mean obedience is always easy. It does not mean there will never be consequences. However, it does mean God is able to care for the man who follows His word. The safest place for Jacob was not Shechem with careful diplomacy, but along the path of obedience to Bethel.

“So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Bethel, he and all the people that were with him. And he built there an altar, and called the place Elbethel: because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother” (Genesis 35:6-7).

Years earlier, Jacob had set up a pillar and called the place Bethel, meaning the house of God. Now he calls it Elbethel, the God of the house of God. That is growth. Earlier in his life, Jacob was impressed with the place. Now he is occupied with the Person. The place was holy because God had met him there, but the place was not the point. God was the point.

“But Deborah Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak: and the name

of it was called Allonbachuth And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padanaram, and blessed him" (Genesis 35:8-9).

God appeared unto Jacob again. Those words are precious. Jacob had met God before, but he needed God again. He had heard from God before, but he needed to hear from Him again. He had been blessed before, but he needed the blessing of God again.

No believer reaches a place where he no longer needs God to meet with him. Yesterday's altar will not sustain today's obedience if the heart grows cold. Yesterday's blessing should be remembered, but it should not replace present fellowship. Jacob needed God again, and so do we.

"And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel" (Genesis 35:10).

God reaffirmed the new name. Jacob had already received that name at Peniel, but now God repeats it at Bethel. It is as though God is reminding him, "You are not what you were. You are not to live as the old Jacob. You are Israel." How often God must remind us of what He has made us. We are quick to return to old patterns, old fears, old schemes, old sins, old compromises, and old identities. God calls us back to walk according to the name He has given.

A Christian should not live like the old man still owns him. ***"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new"*** (2 Corinthians 5:17). The believer may still struggle, stumble, and need correction, but he is not called to live under the mastery of the old life.

God has given him a new standing, a new name, a new direction, and a new walk.

“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 I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land” (Genesis 35:11-12).

God did not base His promise on Jacob’s perfection. If He had, Jacob would have had no hope. God reaffirmed the promise because God is faithful. Jacob had been inconsistent, but God had not. Jacob had wandered, but God’s word remained sure. Jacob had failed in his household, but God’s covenant did not fail.

This does not make Jacob’s sins small. It makes God’s faithfulness great. The same chapter that calls for idols to be buried also shows the promise of God being reaffirmed. God’s grace does not encourage compromise. It calls us out of compromise and then reminds us that His word stands.

“And God went up from him in the place where he talked with him. And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him, even a pillar of stone: and he poured a drink offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon. And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Bethel” (Genesis 35:13-15).

Jacob marks the place again, worships again, and pours out the offering again. There are times when the greatest need in a believer’s life is not something new, but a return to what he already knows. Go back to the Bible, go back to prayer, go back to obedience, go back to the God who

answered you in the day of your distress and was with you in the way which you went.

The chapter does not end with Jacob becoming a flawless man. It ends with a faithful God dealing with a flawed man. That is the story of Jacob's life. He limped, he feared, he failed, he delayed, and he grieved. Yet God kept speaking, kept leading, kept correcting, and kept His promise.

THE DEATH OF RACHEL

Years earlier, Rachel had cried out to Jacob with a desperate prayer: ***"Give me children, or else I die"*** (Genesis 30:1). She wanted children so badly that she equated childlessness with death.

God answered that prayer. He gave her Joseph. Then, on the road between Bethel and Bethlehem, He gave her a second son. The answer to Rachel's prayer came, yet it came at a cost she never could have imagined: she received the child but she lost her life in the receiving.

"And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also. And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin" (Genesis 35:17-18).

There is a sober warning in this for every believer who makes demands of God apart from faith and patience. Forcing an issue, demanding an answer, insisting that God

operate on our timetable, can lead to results we never intended and costs we never anticipated.

As her soul was departing, Rachel named the boy Benoni, which means "son of my sorrow" or "son of my pain." It was the last word of a dying mother, a name written in grief, a label that would have marked this child with tragedy for the rest of his life.

Jacob changed the name. He called him Benjamin, "son of my right hand." In the very moment of his deepest personal grief, Jacob exercised faith. He refused to let the child's identity be defined by the tragedy of his birth. He looked past the sorrow to the blessing. He looked past the pain to the purpose. The boy would not be the son of grief. He would be the son of the right hand, a name of honor, of strength, of blessing and prosperity.

This is one of the clearest evidences of Jacob's spiritual growth. The man who once negotiated with God at Bethel, who once said *"if"* when God said *"I will,"* now responds to the worst day of his life with an act of faith. He does not curse or bargain with God. Instead, he renames the child with a name that looks forward rather than backward. This is what the years of breaking, wrestling, and limping had produced: a man who could stand at a grave and still believe in the goodness of God.

"And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day" (Genesis 35:19-20).

Rachel died near Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. That detail, mentioned almost in passing, it has pretty great significance. Benjamin was born on the way to Ephrath, in

the land of promise, near the very town where the Son of God would one day be born.

The prophet Jeremiah connected Rachel's grief to a future sorrow that would take place in the same region. ***"Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not"*** (Jeremiah 31:15).

Matthew tells us that this prophecy was fulfilled when Herod slaughtered the infants in Bethlehem after the birth of Jesus. ***"Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not"*** (Matthew 2:17-18). Rachel's tears near Bethlehem echoed across the centuries into the tears of mothers whose children were killed because a king feared the birth of the Messiah. The road to Bethlehem has always been a road of sorrow and sacrifice, and it has always pointed toward the coming of Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ came through the line of Judah, but He was born near the place where Rachel died. That is not an accident in the providence of God. Bethlehem was marked by tears, but it would also be marked by the birth of the Saviour. The place associated with Rachel's weeping would one day hear angelic praise: ***"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men"*** (Luke 2:14).

That contrast is beautiful. Rachel's grave reminds us that this world is full of sorrow. The mothers weeping in Bethlehem remind us that this world is full of cruelty. The

death of Rachel reminds us that even the things we most desire cannot deliver us from the curse of sin. Children are a blessing, but children cannot conquer death. Family is a blessing, but family cannot remove sin. Love is a blessing, but love cannot keep the grave from opening. Rachel needed more than a son. Bethlehem needed more than another child to be born. The world needed a Saviour.

That is why Christ came. He was born in Bethlehem not merely to bring sentiment to a sorrowful world, but to bring salvation to a sinful one. He entered a world of graves, tears, violence, and death so that He might go to the cross for sinners. He came to die for our sins, to be buried, and to rise again the third day. He came not merely to sympathize with our tears, but to save our souls.

Rachel called her son Benoni, the son of my sorrow, but Jacob called him Benjamin, the son of my right hand. In that small moment, sorrow was not allowed to have the final word. How much greater is the hope we have in Christ? At the cross, Jesus became the Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, but after His death and resurrection He sat down at the right hand of the Father. In Him, sorrow does not have the final word. Sin does not have the final word. Death does not have the final word. The grave beside Bethlehem points us to the deeper need of man, but the Child born in Bethlehem points us to the only Saviour who can meet it.

JOSEPH'S COAT

We now come to one of the most familiar portions of Genesis: the story of Joseph. Usually, when Genesis 37 is studied, Joseph becomes the center of attention. That is understandable, because Joseph is the one who suffers most visibly. Joseph is the one hated by his brethren. Joseph is the one stripped of his coat. Joseph is the one cast into a pit. Joseph is the one sold into Egypt.

But Genesis 37 is also a chapter in Jacob's life.

Jacob loved Joseph more than all his other children. The Bible does not hide this and actually says it clearly: ***"Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours"*** (Genesis 37:3). The coat was a visible, public declaration of favoritism. Every time Joseph walked through the camp wearing it, his brothers saw it and knew what it meant. Their father loved this boy more than he loved them.

"And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him" (Genesis 37:4).

They hated him. Jacob had grown up in a home divided by favoritism. Isaac loved Esau and Rebekah loved Jacob. Jacob knew firsthand the damage that a parent's preference could cause. Yet he repeated the pattern. This is one of the saddest realities of human nature. We do not always learn from our pain but instead simply pass it along.

Joseph's brothers conspired against him. They stripped him of his coat, threw him into a pit, and sold him to a band of Ishmeelite merchants heading to Egypt. Then they did something that we are going to closely examine in this chapter.

"And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; And they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no" (Genesis 37:31-32).

They killed a kid of the goats. They dipped the coat in the blood. They brought it to their father and asked him to identify it.

A goat. Do you see it? Do you see the thread that runs through this family like a curse? Jacob killed a goat and used its skin to deceive his blind father into believing he was Esau. Look at Genesis 27:16 again for reference ***"And she put the skins of the kids of the goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck:"***

Now Jacob's own sons kill a kid of the goats and use its blood to deceive him into believing Joseph is dead. The instrument of deception is the same and the victim is, again, a father who cannot see the truth. The only thing that has changed is who is holding the goatskin.

Jacob deceived Isaac with a goat. Jacob's sons deceived Jacob with a goat. The man who sowed deception in his father's tent reaped deception in his own.

"And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him" (Genesis 37:33-35).

Jacob mourned for Joseph for years. He believed his favorite son was dead, torn apart by wild animals. The grief consumed him. He refused comfort from his other children. He said he would carry this sorrow to his grave.

All the while, the very sons who had caused his grief stood before him offering comfort they had no right to give, hiding a secret they would carry for over twenty years. The deception was complete. Jacob, the master deceiver, had been thoroughly, devastatingly deceived by his own household.

Jacob's life reminds us that sin does not simply disappear because time passes. The years may move on, circumstances may change, and a man may even become older

and wiser in many ways, but the seed he has sown can still produce a bitter harvest.

Jacob had deceived his father with a goat. Now Jacob is deceived by his sons with a goat. He had used the blindness of Isaac to accomplish his own will. Now his own sons use his blindness to the truth to hide their sin. Jacob had once caused grief in his father's house, and now grief has entered his own house. The reaping was not immediate, but it still happened.

This is a warning to the saved man. God may forgive sin, but that does not mean sin is harmless. Grace does not turn disobedience into wisdom. Mercy does not remove every earthly consequence. A Christian cannot sow dishonesty, bitterness, favoritism, pride, worldliness, or carelessness and expect a peaceful harvest. The Bible says, ***“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”*** (Galatians 6:7).

It is possible to be loved by God and still suffer under the consequences of your own choices. Jacob was God's chosen man, but Jacob still reaped what he had sown. That should make every believer stop and examine his life. What habits are we excusing? What attitudes are we passing down? What sins have we renamed instead of repented of? What patterns did we hate in others, yet now practice ourselves?

There is also a warning here for the unsaved reader. You may think your sin is hidden. Joseph's brothers certainly did. They staged the scene, stained the coat, delivered the lie, and watched their father come to the wrong conclusion. For years, their secret remained buried.

Jacob looked at the bloody coat and was deceived, but God was not deceived. Jacob did not know where Joseph was, but God did. Jacob did not know what his sons had done, but God saw it. The same is true of every sinner. You may fool people, you may hide your guilt, you may carry your secret for years, but you will *never* deceive God.

The answer is not to cover sin better. The answer is to have sin cleansed. Joseph's brothers used blood to hide their sin, but Jesus Christ shed His blood to pay for sin. Their blood-stained coat was part of a lie, but the shed blood of Christ on the cross is God's truth of salvation. The Lord Jesus, the beloved Son of God, was rejected, hated, delivered up, and slain. He died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day.

Do not wait until the harvest comes to take sin seriously. Do not keep pretending that what is hidden will stay hidden forever. Whether you are saved or lost, this chapter calls you to stop and consider what you are sowing. Sin always costs more than it first appears. It reaches farther than we intended. It grieves more people than we expected. It lasts longer than we imagined.

But God *is* merciful.

The same God who sees the sin also provided the Saviour. If you are saved, come clean before the Lord and let Him break the pattern. If you are lost, come to Jesus Christ and be saved. You do not need another covering of your own making.

You need the Lord Jesus Christ.

A NOT SO BRIEF OVERVIEW OF JOSEPH'S TIME IN EGYPT

It is my goal with this chapter to, without shifting the focus away from Jacob for too long, to give a brief overview on Joseph's story for those who may not know it well. I will try to keep it brief and informative, but there is also a lot to learn from Joseph's story that I believe would be a blessing for us to see as we go along. Therefore, this is a *not so brief overview* of Joseph's time in Egypt, leading up to his encounter with his father.

Many years had passed since Joseph's alleged death. Jacob grew old in Canaan, mourning for Joseph, believing his favorite son was dead.

Those years were not empty years in the sight of God. Jacob did not know it, but while he was mourning in Canaan, Joseph was living in Egypt. The son Jacob thought was in the grave was actually in the hand of God. Jacob had seen a bloody coat and concluded that the story was over, but God was writing chapters Jacob could not see.

Joseph had been sold by his brethren, carried down into Egypt, and bought by Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh. There, the Lord was with Joseph. Even in bondage, Joseph was not abandoned. He served faithfully in Potiphar's house, and God prospered the work of his hands.

But Joseph's suffering was not over. Potiphar's wife falsely accused him, and Joseph was cast into prison. He had done right and suffered for it. That is one of the hardest tests of faith. It is one thing to suffer because of foolishness. It is another thing to suffer after obedience. Joseph had been hated by his brethren, sold into slavery, falsely accused, and forgotten in prison.

Joseph's resistance to Potiphar's wife gives one of the clearest examples of purity in all the Bible. His answer is what we should all say when tempted: ***"How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"*** (Genesis 39:9). Joseph understood that sin is first and foremost against God. Potiphar may have been absent, but God was present. Joseph's purity was not built on the fear of getting caught by man, it was built on the fear of God.

That is where many people fail in temptation. They ask themselves, "Will anyone know?" Joseph asked, ***"How can I sin against God?"*** They ask, "Can I get away with it?" Joseph knew there is no such thing as getting away with sin before the Lord. Purity must be rooted deeper than reputation. A person who is only pure because people are watching will fall when he thinks he is alone.

Joseph also gives us the proper response to temptation: flee. When Potiphar's wife pressed him day by day, Joseph refused to hearken unto her or to be with her. When the moment became dangerous, he left his garment and fled. That was not

weakness, but wisdom. The Christian who thinks he is strong enough to linger around sin is already in danger. Joseph lost his coat, but he kept his character. It is better to lose something earthly than to lose a clean conscience before God.

So Joseph was falsely accused and imprisoned. While there, he interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's butler and baker. When they initially asked Joseph to interpret their dreams, he responded with: ***"Do not interpretations belong to God?"*** (Genesis 40:8). That statement reveals Joseph's whole approach to life. He did not pretend to have wisdom in himself or want to take the place of God. He pointed men back to the Lord as the source of truth. We would all be better off with that same insistence. In a world full of opinions, commentary, podcasts, personalities, traditions, and philosophies, God's people ought to say, ***"Do not interpretations belong to God?"*** The final authority is not how I feel, what culture says, what religion teaches, or what some expert claims. The final authority is what God has said.

Joseph interpreted dreams because God gave the interpretation. Today, we are not looking for new dreams or private revelations. God has given us His written word. The Bible interprets life. The Bible tells us what sin is, what salvation is, what man is, who Christ is, what judgment is, and what eternity holds. If interpretations belong to God, then we must bring every question back to His Book. The believer should not ask, "What do I want this to mean?" but "What has God said?" The unsaved man should not ask, "Which religion do I prefer?" but "What does God say about my soul?"

So, after interpreting the dreams, the butler was restored to his office, just as Joseph had said, but he forgot Joseph for

two full years. Think about this: Joseph interpreted his dream, the interpretation came to pass exactly as God had revealed, and the butler was restored to his place beside Pharaoh. Yet the Bible says, ***“Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him”*** (Genesis 40:23). How soon we can hear from God, receive light from God, be helped by God, and then go right back to life as usual. The butler had seen the faithfulness of God in the prison, but comfort made him forget what trouble had taught him. That is a danger for every believer. We pray in distress, seek counsel in difficulty, promise faithfulness in the valley, and then when God brings relief, we forget the very truth He showed us there. It is not enough to hear from God in the hard place, we should carry what God showed us into the restored place. The butler forgot Joseph when he got back to the palace, but the child of God must be careful not to forget the Lord when life becomes comfortable again.

The story of Joseph teaches us that a godly man ought to be faithful wherever God places him. Joseph did not wait until he was in the palace to become diligent. He was diligent as a slave, he was diligent as a prisoner, he was diligent when no one was applauding him, and he was diligent when the work seemed to benefit someone else more than himself. In Potiphar’s house, he served so faithfully that Potiphar committed all that he had into Joseph’s hand. In the prison, the keeper of the prison trusted Joseph with the other prisoners. Joseph’s circumstances changed, but his character did not.

That is a needed rebuke to the spirit of excuse-making. Many people say they would be faithful if they had a better position, a better job, a better family situation, or better opportunities. Joseph had none of those things, yet he still

served well. He did not say, "I am only a slave, so why should I care?" He understood that wherever he was, he was still under God's eye. The Christian should work faithfully, not merely because of who signs the paycheck, but because God sees the heart and honors faithfulness.

Joseph also shows us the value of serving another man's interests with integrity. He worked for Potiphar's good, even though Potiphar was his master. He served in the prison, even though the prison was not where he wanted to be. Later, he served Pharaoh and preserved Egypt, even though Egypt was not his homeland. Joseph proves that godliness is not an excuse for laziness, bitterness, or careless work. A believer should be the kind of person who can be trusted with responsibility because he works as unto the Lord. If a man cannot be faithful in another man's house, he should not expect God to entrust him with his own.

When Pharaoh dreamed dreams that no magician of Egypt could interpret, the butler *finally* remembered Joseph. Joseph was brought out of the prison and stood before Pharaoh. He did not take credit for the interpretation. Joseph said, "***It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace***" (Genesis 41:16). Even after two years of being forgotten by the butler, Joseph still knew and affirmed that interpretations belong to God.

God revealed to Joseph that seven years of plenty would be followed by seven years of famine. Pharaoh saw the wisdom of God in Joseph and exalted him over all the land of Egypt. In one day, Joseph went from prisoner to ruler. He was made second only to Pharaoh. He was given authority to gather grain during the years of plenty so that Egypt would have bread during the years of famine.

Eventually, the famine came to Canaan. Jacob and his sons needed bread. The land of promise itself was hungry, and word reached Jacob that there was corn in Egypt. So Jacob sent his remaining sons down to buy grain. However, he kept Benjamin at home.

Benjamin was Rachel's only surviving child in Jacob's mind. Joseph was gone, and Benjamin was all Jacob had left of the woman he loved most. Jacob had already lost Rachel. He believed he had lost Joseph. He could not bear the thought of losing Benjamin too.

“And Jacob said, My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone”
(Genesis 42:38).

Those words reveal how deeply Jacob's grief still ruled him. Joseph had been gone for more than twenty years, but the wound was still open. Jacob's sons stood before him, but his heart was fixed on the two sons of Rachel. He said Benjamin was ***“left alone,”*** even though Benjamin had many brothers. Grief and favoritism still shaped the way Jacob saw his family.

When the brothers arrived in Egypt, they stood before Joseph, but they did not recognize him. Joseph recognized them immediately. The last time they had seen Joseph, he was a young man being sold into slavery. Now he was dressed as an Egyptian ruler, speaking through an interpreter, holding power over the food supply of the world.

But Joseph did not immediately reveal himself. He tested them.

This was not petty revenge. Joseph was not merely trying to make them suffer. He needed to know whether they were the same men who had thrown him into a pit and

sold him for silver. He needed to know whether they would sacrifice Benjamin the way they had once sacrificed him. He needed to know whether their father was alive and whether their hearts had changed.

Joseph accused them of being spies and demanded that they bring Benjamin to prove their words. He held Simeon in Egypt while the others returned to Canaan. On the way home, the brothers discovered that their money had been restored in their sacks. Fear came upon them. God was beginning to trouble their consciences.

When they returned to Jacob, they told him that the ruler of Egypt demanded to see Benjamin. Jacob refused. He was not willing to let Benjamin go. The famine continued, and the food ran out. At last, Judah stepped forward and promised to bear the blame forever if he did not bring Benjamin home again.

So Jacob finally sent Benjamin.

“And their father Israel said unto them, If it must be so now, do this” (Genesis 43:11).

Those words are heavy with resignation. Jacob did not send Benjamin with confidence. He sent him because the famine forced his hand.

When the brothers returned to Egypt with Benjamin, Joseph's heart was overwhelmed. He saw his younger brother, his own mother's son, and had to leave the room to weep. Yet he still did not reveal himself.

Joseph sent them away with grain, but he commanded that his silver cup be placed in Benjamin's sack. After they departed, his steward pursued them and accused them of theft. The cup was found with Benjamin. The brothers

were brought back to Joseph, and Benjamin now appeared guilty. This was the moment of truth.

Would the brothers abandon Benjamin to save themselves? Would they return to Jacob without Rachel's other son? Would they let their father go down to the grave in sorrow again, or had they truly changed?

Let's read this section and see what happens in Genesis 44:12-34:

12 And he searched, and began at the eldest, and left at the youngest: and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.

13 Then they rent their clothes, and laded every man his ass, and returned to the city.

14 And Judah and his brethren came to Joseph's house; for he was yet there: and they fell before him on the ground.

15 And Joseph said unto them, What deed is this that ye have done? wot ye not that such a man as I can certainly divine?

16 And Judah said, What shall we say unto my lord? what shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants: behold, we are my lord's servants, both we, and he also with whom the cup is found.

17 And he said, God forbid that I should do so: but the man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant; and as for you, get you up in peace unto your father.

18 Then Judah came near unto him, and said, Oh my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant: for thou art even as Pharaoh.

19 My lord asked his servants, saying, Have ye a father, or a brother?

20 And we said unto my lord, We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him.

21 And thou saidst unto thy servants, Bring him down unto me, that I may set mine eyes upon him.

22 And we said unto my lord, The lad cannot leave his father: for if he should leave his father, his father would die.

23 And thou saidst unto thy servants, Except your youngest brother come down with you, ye shall see my face no more.

24 And it came to pass when we came up unto thy servant my father, we told him the words of my lord.

25 And our father said, Go again, and buy us a little food.

26 And we said, We cannot go down: if our youngest brother be with us, then will we go down: for we may not see the man's face, except our youngest brother be with us.

27 And thy servant my father said unto us, Ye know that my wife bare me two sons:

28 And the one went out from me, and I said, Surely he is torn in pieces; and I saw him not since:

29 And if ye take this also from me, and mischief befall him, ye shall bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.

30 Now therefore when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us; seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life;

31 It shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die: and thy servants shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave.

32 For thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever.

33 Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren.

34 For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father.

Judah's confession is one of the turning points in the story. When the cup was found in Benjamin's sack, Judah did not keep arguing, shifting blame, or trying to escape. He said, ***"God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants"***

(Genesis 44:16). That is a remarkable statement because Joseph's cup was not really the deepest issue. The sin God had found out went much farther back than that day. More than twenty years earlier, these men had plotted against Joseph, lied to Jacob, and buried the matter as though it would never rise again. Yet, now they were beginning to realize that God had not forgotten what they had tried to hide.

That is a serious application for every sinner. Time and distance does not erase sin. A man may move on from what he has done, but that does not mean God has moved on from it. Judah's words remind us that God knows how to find out iniquity. He can bring a buried sin back before the conscience. He can use circumstances to uncover what a man has refused to confess. The wise response is not to make excuses, but to come clean before God. The sinner does not need a better cover-up, he needs forgiveness.

There is also a lesson here for the believer. The brothers had lived for years under the weight of a lie. Hidden sin never stays private in its effects. It hardens the conscience, damages fellowship, breeds fear, and often hurts people far beyond what we imagined. When God brings conviction, it is mercy. He is not being cruel when He exposes sin. He is leading the sinner to the place where mercy can be found. Judah's confession brought them to the end of excuses, and that was exactly where they needed to be.

Judah's offer in Genesis 44:33 is one of the most sacrificial moments in the life of any man in Genesis. He said, ***"Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren."*** Judah was not merely feeling sorry, but willing to suffer in Benjamin's

place. He was willing to become a slave so his brother could go free.

There is a powerful family application here. Judah had watched Jacob suffer for more than twenty years under the lie they had created. He knew what it had done to his father. Earlier in life, he had helped break Jacob's heart. Now he was willing to break his own future to spare his father more sorrow. Sin often makes us selfish and blind to the pain we cause. Repentance opens our eyes. Judah finally saw that his choices affected more than himself. That is a lesson every son, daughter, sister, brother, father, mother, and friend must learn. We do not sin in isolation. Our actions touch the people around us.

Judah's intercession here also points us to the Lord Jesus Christ. Judah stood before Joseph and pleaded for Benjamin. He offered himself as a substitute. ***"Let thy servant abide instead of the lad."*** That is substitution: one stands in the place of another. Judah was willing to become a bondman for Benjamin, but Jesus Christ did far more for sinners. He did not merely risk bondage, He went to the cross. He bore our sins in His own body on the tree and He took the place of the guilty so the guilty could be set free.

This is especially of note because Jesus is ***"the Lion of the tribe of Juda"*** (Revelation 5:5). The best moment in Judah's life becomes a shadow of the greater work of Christ. Judah became surety for Benjamin and offered himself in his place, but Christ is the surety of a better testament. Judah pleaded for a brother who appeared guilty, but Christ died for sinners who truly were guilty. Judah offered to live as a slave, but Christ humbled

Himself unto death, even the death of the cross. Judah's act was noble, but Christ's sacrifice is saving.

The gospel is not that God ignored our guilt. The gospel is that Christ stood in the place of the guilty. We were the ones under condemnation. We were the ones who deserved judgment. We were the ones who could not free ourselves. Yet the Lord Jesus Christ stepped in and said, as it were, "Let the guilty go free. I will bear it." That is substitution. That is grace. That is why salvation is not earned by works, religion, penance, baptism, church membership, or human effort. The penalty has been borne by another. The sinner's part is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. (Genesis 45:1-3).

Notice that Joseph ***"wept aloud."*** Joseph was not cold or detached. He was not playing a part anymore. The ruler of Egypt wept like a brother. Joseph had suffered deeply, and his tears show that the pain had been real, but they also show that his love for his brethren had remained. In this, we see a small picture of the heart of Christ. The Lord Jesus came unto His own, and His own received Him not. He was despised, rejected, falsely accused, delivered up by the Jews, condemned by the Gentiles, and crucified

for our sins. Yet after all that man did to Him, His heart is still one of mercy toward sinners. The same Christ whom men rejected now says, ***“Come unto me.”*** The same Saviour who bore our sins in His own body on the tree still calls guilty sinners near. We have sinned against Him far more than Joseph’s brethren sinned against Joseph, yet He does not delight in casting away the repentant. He is willing to receive, forgive, cleanse, and restore all who come to Him by faith.

Notice that Joseph sent the Egyptians out of the room, and *then* he revealed himself to his brethren. In a far greater way, there must be a personal meeting between the sinner and Christ. Others may preach to us, pray for us, and point us to the Saviour, but no one can meet Christ for us. The soul must be brought before Him personally. Salvation is not merely being near religious people or hearing about Christ from a distance. It is Christ making Himself known to the sinner, and the sinner coming to Him by faith.

Let’s read the rest of this passage in Genesis 45:4-15:

4 And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.

5 Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

6 For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest.

7 And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

8 So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

9 Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not:

10 And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast:

11 And there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty.

12 And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you.

13 And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither.

14 And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck.

15 Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him.

Joseph did not hide their sin when he called them near. He said, ***“I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.”*** That was painful, but it was also necessary. Forgiveness does not require dishonesty. Joseph did not say, “You never did anything wrong.” He did not pretend the pit, the slavery, and the years of sorrow had never happened. He named the sin plainly, but he named it in the presence of mercy. So it is with Christ. He knows our sin better than we do, yet He calls sinners to Himself. The same Lord who can read the whole record of our guilt is the Lord who is able to blot it out.

It is also of note that Joseph still called himself their brother. He did not say only, “I am Joseph.” He said, ***“I am Joseph your brother.”*** The relationship had not been destroyed by their sin. They had acted shamefully, cruelly, and wickedly, but Joseph was still their brother. This gives us a helpful picture of the security of the believer in Christ. When a man is born again, he is brought into the family of God. He may grieve the Lord, lose fellowship, lose joy, lose reward, and come under chastening, but he does not cease to be God’s child. Salvation rests upon the finished work of Christ, not the strength of the believer. The child of God is not kept saved by his own perfect faithfulness, but by the faithfulness of the Saviour who bought him.

That does not make sin light. Joseph still said, “whom ye sold into Egypt.” Their relationship did not erase the seriousness of their sin. In the same way, eternal security is not an excuse for careless living. Sin in the life of a believer is still grievous. It damages fellowship, it brings conviction, it may bring chastening, but it does not undo the new birth. A disobedient son is still a son, though he may need correction.

Notice the peculiar phrase in verse 8, where Joseph said that God had made him ***“a father to Pharaoh.”*** He was not speaking of natural relation, but of the place of counsel, wisdom, and preservation God had given him. Pharaoh had the throne, but Joseph had been raised up to guide and preserve the kingdom. What a testimony to the providence of God that the boy sold into slavery became the man that Egypt depended upon. This reminds us that no season of obedience is wasted, that God can prepare a man for usefulness he never imagined.

This also points us again to Christ. Joseph became a fatherly preserver to Pharaoh and Egypt, but the Lord Jesus is the true and greater Preserver of life. Joseph was raised up to preserve men from famine, but Christ was raised up to save sinners from sin, death, and hell. Joseph had bread for a hungry world, but Christ is the bread of life.

After Joseph revealed himself to his brethren, he did not merely forgive them and send them away. He told them to bring Jacob down to Egypt and said, ***“thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me”*** (Genesis 45:10). Joseph wanted his father and brethren near. The ones who had once been far off through sin and separation were now invited into nearness and provision. This is, yet another, picture of Christ. The Lord does not save sinners so they can remain at a distance. He calls them near. He brings them into fellowship. Salvation is not merely escaping judgment, but being brought nigh to God through the blood of Christ.

Joseph also told them to declare his glory to Jacob: ***“And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and***

of all that ye have seen" (Genesis 45:13). The men who had once carried Jacob a bloody coat and a lie were now sent home with a message of life and glory. That is a powerful reversal. Grace can change the message a man carries. Before, their words brought grief. Now, their words would bring hope. Before, they hid Joseph's life. Now, they were to proclaim it. That is what salvation does. The redeemed sinner now has a message to carry: the rejected one is alive, exalted, and able to save.

There is a good application here for witnessing. Joseph told them to speak of what they had seen. That is still the believer's responsibility. We are to tell others of the glory of Christ, not merely as a theory, but as those who have tasted His mercy ourselves. The brothers could go back and say, "Joseph is alive. We saw him. He spoke to us. He forgave us. He has bread!" The Christian can say something far greater: "Christ is alive. He forgives sinners. He saved me. He has grace enough for you."

Surely Joseph's brethren must have been eager to tell Jacob. For more than twenty years, their father had lived in sorrow. He believed Joseph was dead. His spirit had been weighed down by grief, and his heart had been wounded by a lie. However, now, they had news that could revive him. Joseph was not dead, he was alive. Joseph was exalted. Joseph had provision enough to preserve the whole family. How could they keep that to themselves? How could they walk slowly with such tidings? The very message they carried had power to lift the head of a grieving man.

We today have been entrusted with far better news than Joseph's brethren carried to Jacob. We are not merely telling men that Joseph is alive in Egypt, we are telling

them that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. We are not merely telling them there is food in Egypt, we are telling them there is salvation in Christ. We are not merely telling them that an earthly famine can be survived, we are telling them that sinners can be saved from sin, death, hell, and the wrath to come. Why would we not want to tell people about the Lord?

The world is full of people like Jacob, living under sorrow, fear, guilt, and spiritual famine. Some are trying to survive on religion. Some are trying to quiet their conscience with good works. Some are burdened by sin and do not know where forgiveness can be found. Some are convinced there is no hope for them. Yet the believer has good news for them: Christ is alive. Christ has paid for sin. Christ receives sinners. Christ has bread enough for the hungry soul. If Joseph's brethren had reason to hurry home with good news, how much more should the child of God be stirred to carry the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?

This also reminds us that witnessing should not be done begrudgingly. Joseph's brothers had seen something wonderful. They had heard Joseph's voice. They had received mercy when they deserved judgment. They had been sent away with provision and promise. That is the very kind of testimony a Christian has. We are not preaching a Christ we have never met. We are not offering a grace we have never needed. We are telling guilty sinners about the Saviour who had mercy on us.

Later, when Jacob heard the news (which we'll discuss later), the Bible says, ***"the spirit of Jacob their father revived"*** (Genesis 45:27). That is what good news can do. The gospel does not merely inform, but brings hope. It tells the condemned man there is pardon. It tells the hungry

soul there is bread. It tells the weary sinner there is rest. It tells the dead sinner there is life in Christ. We cannot make people believe, just as Joseph's brethren could not force Jacob to receive the report, however we can still carry the message faithfully and point them to the evidence of the risen and exalted Son.

So, if we have seen the glory of Christ in the Bible, if we have tasted His forgiveness, if we know that He is alive, if we know there is enough grace in Him for sinners, why would we be silent? Joseph said, ***"Ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen"*** (Genesis 45:13). The Lord has given us a greater charge. We are to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. We are to tell what we have seen in the word of God, what Christ has done for sinners, and what He has done for us. The message is too good, the need is too great, and the Saviour is too worthy for His people to keep silent.

That is important when we come to verses 14 and 15. Before Joseph sent them home to tell Jacob, the Bible says, ***"And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him"*** (Genesis 45:14-15). These men were not being sent away with a message from a stranger, instead they were being sent away after an embrace. They had felt Joseph's affection, they had heard Joseph's voice, and they had received Joseph's forgiveness. They had stood in his presence, not as condemned men, but as restored brethren.

Joseph's brethren could go home and say, "Joseph is alive." Not only that, but they could *also* say, "Joseph received us.

Joseph forgave us. Joseph embraced us. Joseph spoke with us." The believer can say far more: "Christ is risen. Christ saves. Christ forgave me. Christ received me. Christ has grace enough for you."

Read again the end of verse 15: ***"and after that his brethren talked with him."*** Earlier, when Joseph revealed himself, they could not answer him because they were troubled at his presence. Yet, forgiveness from Joseph brought about conversation. Now they could speak with the one they had wronged. That is what salvation does for the sinner. Sin leaves a man guilty and speechless before God, but the blood of Christ brings him near and gives him fellowship with God.

This also helps us understand the spirit in which we should witness. Evangelism is not merely winning an argument to score points or distributing information. It is one forgiven sinner telling another sinner where forgiveness can be found. It is one soul telling another hungry soul where there is bread. It is one who has been brought near telling those who are far off that Christ still receives sinners. If we have been embraced by grace, how can we not tell others about that grace?

So when Joseph's brethren left Egypt, they did not leave merely with grain in their sacks. They left with the warmth of reconciliation in their hearts and the command to tell their father of Joseph's glory. No wonder the news later revived Jacob's spirit! They had seen Joseph alive, exalted, merciful, and full of provision. In the same way, we go to the world with the message of a living, exalted, merciful, and all-sufficient Saviour. The gospel is not a rumor to us. It is the truth by which we have been saved.

So Joseph had commanded them to return to Canaan and bring Jacob down to Egypt. The famine would continue, and Joseph would nourish his father, his brethren, and all their households. The son who had been rejected would become the preserver of the family.

JACOB AND JOSEPH

Joseph had commanded his brothers to return to Canaan and bring Jacob down to Egypt. The brothers returned with wagons, provisions, and the impossible news that the brother they had sold into slavery was not only alive, but was the ruler of all Egypt.

Before we consider Jacob's reaction, let us pause and consider the position of the brothers. They had lived with a secret for more than twenty years, they had watched their father mourn, they had watched him refuse to be comforted, and they had watched him cling to Benjamin with a desperate, fearful grip, terrified of losing the only son of Rachel he believed he had left. For twenty years they had carried the weight of what they had done, and for twenty years they had said nothing.

Now they *had* to speak. To tell Jacob that Joseph was alive was also to confess that Joseph had never been dead. The bloody coat, the story of the evil beast, the decades of deception, all of it would have to come out. They could

not deliver the good news without exposing the old lie. They could not give their father the joy of Joseph's life without giving him the grief of their betrayal.

How many sins work this way? They are committed in a moment and carried for a lifetime. The brothers could have confessed twenty years earlier and spared their father two decades of needless grief. They could have spent that time searching for Joseph. Yet, instead, they chose the path of concealment, and the concealment cost them their peace and cost Jacob his joy for all those years.

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). The brothers had covered their sin, and they had not prospered in the covering. The guilt had followed them. We saw it when they stood before Joseph in Egypt and said among themselves, ***"We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us"*** (Genesis 42:21). Twenty years later, the anguish of Joseph's face was *still* before their eyes.

"And they went up out of Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan unto Jacob their father, And told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not" (Genesis 45:25-26).

Joseph is yet alive. Four words that should have filled Jacob with joy. Instead, his heart fainted, he could not believe it.

That is understandable. He had lived too long under the shadow of Joseph's supposed death to instantly stand in the

light of Joseph's life. When a man has believed a lie for twenty years, the truth feels like a shock. Jacob's heart could not hold either one without staggering.

There is a spiritual parallel here that is worth considering. When the gospel is first presented to a lost sinner, it can feel the same way. You have lived your entire life believing certain things about yourself, about God, about death, about eternity. Then someone tells you that the Son of God is alive, that He died for your sins and rose again, that there is forgiveness and eternal life for anyone who will believe. The natural response is Jacob's response: the heart faints. It is too good. It cannot be true. The lie has been believed for too long.

Yet it is true. Joseph was alive whether Jacob believed it or not. The truth does not depend on our ability to receive it.

“And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them: and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived” (Genesis 45:27).

We see that Jacob needed evidence. The words alone were not enough. So the brothers did what Joseph had told them to do: they told him all the words of Joseph. We saw in the last chapter that Joseph had told them to tell Jacob about his glory in Egypt, about the provision that awaited them, about the five remaining years of famine, and about the land of Goshen where they would dwell. The brothers delivered the message completely and left nothing out.

Yet it was not the words alone that turned Jacob's heart. It was the wagons.

When he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived. Jacob could

not easily verify the words. He had no way of confirming everything his sons were telling him. More than that, he had been deceived by these same sons before. They had once brought him a bloody coat and allowed him to believe Joseph was dead. Now they were telling him Joseph was alive, exalted, and calling for him to come down into Egypt. The words were wonderful, but the source was suspect.

The wagons were different. The wagons were physical, tangible evidence that someone with the authority and resources of Egypt had sent for him. Jacob's sons did not own wagons like these. They could not have fabricated them. They could not have produced such evidence on their own. The wagons were proof that the message was true because they could only have come from the person the message described. Joseph was alive, and the wagons proved that the invitation was real.

Is this not how faith works? We hear the words of the gospel. We are told that Christ is alive, that He died for our sins, that He was buried, that He rose again the third day, that He offers forgiveness and everlasting life, and that He is coming again. The words are wonderful, but now the question is whether we believe them. However, God has not asked us to believe a message with no witness, no evidence, and no foundation. He has sent the wagons.

First, God has given us the Bible. The Bible is not a collection of religious opinions or human guesses about God. It is the written word of God. Peter said, ***“We have also a more sure word of prophecy”*** (2 Peter 1:19). That is remarkable because Peter had seen the Lord Jesus glorified on the mount. He had heard the voice from heaven. Yet he

still points believers to the written word as a more sure word of prophecy. The Bible is one of God's great wagons to the doubting soul. It carries the message of Christ with authority, clarity, and certainty.

Think of how empty our witnessing would be if we had no Bible to point to. Imagine telling a lost man about sin, judgment, the cross, the resurrection, and eternal life, but having no written word of God to open before him. What would our message rest on? Our opinion? Our feelings? Our personal experience? Those are the misguided tools the world relies on. One person speaks of reincarnation, another of pantheism, another of some vague "energy" in the universe, and another of his own private idea of God. Yet when pressed, there is no final authority beneath it. There is no sure word. There is no preserved revelation from God. Praise the Lord, the Christian is not left to say, "This is just how I see it." We can instead open the Bible and say, ***"Thus saith the Lord."*** The Bible is one of the great wagons God has sent. God's word give weight, authority, and evidence to the message we preach.

Another wagon God has sent is fulfilled prophecy. Across thousands of years, the Bible has spoken of things before they came to pass. The place of Christ's birth, the manner of His suffering, His betrayal, His death, His resurrection, the scattering and preservation of Israel, and many other matters were written before they unfolded in history. Man can make predictions, but only God can declare the end from the beginning. Fulfilled prophecy is not a small thing, and it is one of the wagons God has sent to show that His word is true.

God has also given the evidence of transformed lives. Across the centuries, millions of people from every kind of

background have been changed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Drunkards have been made sober. Thieves have been made honest. Proud men have been humbled. Bitter people have been made forgiving. Fearful souls have been given peace. Religious hypocrites have been brought to sincere faith. This does not happen because of human self-improvement. It happens because the gospel is ***“the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth”*** (Romans 1:16). A changed life is a wagon, and it is a visible evidence that Christ is alive and still able to save.

There is also the evidence of answered prayer. The child of God does not merely believe in a God who acted long ago. He knows a God who hears and answers prayer now. Not according to our timing or will, and not always according to our preference, but truly, personally, and faithfully. Again and again, the believer can look back and say, “God heard me there. God helped me there. God opened that door. God gave grace in that trial. God provided when I had no way.” These answers to prayer are not the foundation of our faith, but they are confirming mercies along the way. They are wagons from the Lord, reminding us that He is real, present, and active.

This is important because many people think faith means believing without reason. That is not biblical faith. Faith is not a blind leap into darkness. Faith is taking God at His word because God has proven Himself true. Jacob was not asked to believe an empty rumor. He heard the words of Joseph, and then he saw the wagons Joseph had sent. In the same way, the sinner hears the gospel, and God has surrounded that gospel with witnesses: the Bible, fulfilled prophecy, the resurrection testimony, transformed lives,

answered prayer, and the work of the Spirit through the word of God.

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Jacob heard the words, saw the wagons, and his spirit revived. Faith came by hearing, and the wagons confirmed that the message was true.

There is a lesson here for the doubting soul. Jacob had spent more than twenty years believing Joseph was dead. That belief had shaped his grief, his fears, and his view of the future. However, it was not true. A false belief can *feel* true when you have carried it long enough. Some sinners have believed for years that Christ would never receive them. Some believers have believed for years that God is finished with them. Some wounded souls have believed for years that nothing can ever revive their spirit again. Yet, the word of God comes, and the wagons appear, and the heart begins to live.

Jacob’s spirit revived because Joseph was alive. That is the great message we carry to the world. Christ is alive, the rejected Son is exalted, the provision is ready, the invitation is real, the journey home has already been supplied, and the sinner does not have to invent a way to God. God has sent His Son, given His word, preserved His promises, and provided every evidence needed to call men to faith.

Jacob saw the wagons and said, ***“It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive”*** (Genesis 45:28). That is where the gospel brings the soul. It brings us from suspicion to certainty, from grief to hope, from famine to provision, from distance to nearness. The evidence is enough because the Saviour is enough. Christ is alive, and that changes everything.

On the way to Egypt, God spoke to Jacob one final time.

"And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I. And he said, 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" (Genesis 46:2-4).

Notice that God said: ***"Jacob, Jacob."*** God called his old name instead of *Israel*. Why? Perhaps because the old man needed to hear that the God who had known him as Jacob, who had met him at Bethel when he was nothing but a fugitive with a guilty conscience, was still the same God. Perhaps because the name Jacob reminded him of how far he had come. Perhaps because God wanted him to know that He loved the whole man, the schemer and the prince, the heel-grabber and the worshipper, the man he was born as and the man he had been remade into.

Jacob needed that word from God. Going down into Egypt was no small matter. Abraham had gone down into Egypt in a time of famine, and trouble followed. Isaac had been warned not to go down into Egypt. The pattern of the family was that Egypt meant danger. God broke the pattern with a promise: I will go down with thee. ***"I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again"***

The same promises God had made at Bethel decades earlier are echoed here, yet the circumstances had changed so much. Jacob was no longer a young man fleeing his brother, he was an old man going to meet his son. Yet the promises of God had not changed. God's faithfulness

outlasts every season of grief, every act of disobedience, every wrong turn, and every bloody coat.

This move would shape the future of Israel. Jacob entered Egypt as a family. His descendants would one day leave Egypt as a nation. God said, ***"I will there make of thee a great nation."*** The place that seemed like exile would become the incubator for a people. The famine that seemed like judgment would become the instrument of preservation.

Then came the reunion.

"And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while" (Genesis 46:29).

Joseph made ready his chariot. The ruler of Egypt did not send a servant. He did not wait in his palace for his father to be brought to him. He went himself and prepared his own chariot. He drove out to Goshen to meet the old man who had mourned him for twenty years.

He fell on his neck and wept a good while. It was a long, weeping, clinging reunion. The son who had been thrown into a pit and sold to merchants and falsely accused and imprisoned and forgotten, fell on the neck of the father who had given him the coat and mourned him as dead, and they wept together a good while.

"And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive" (Genesis 46:30).

Jacob was satisfied. The grief that had followed him for decades had been answered. He did not mean that life had

no more purpose. He meant that the great burden had been lifted. The wound that had been open for twenty years was finally closed. Joseph was alive. His face was real. The wagons had not lied.

The boy who was sold into slavery and the father who was sold a lie were reunited by the hand of God.

This chapter teaches us that God often works where we cannot see. Jacob saw none of Joseph's rise in Egypt. He did not see Potiphar's house. He did not see the prison. He did not see Pharaoh's dreams. He did not see the years of preparation that turned a slave boy into the second most powerful man in the world. For twenty years, all Jacob saw was nothing except the evidence of loss.

Yet God was working every single day of those twenty years. He was working in the prison. He was working in Pharaoh's court. He was working in the famine. He was arranging every detail of a plan that would not only preserve Joseph, but preserve the entire family of Israel and through them, the Messianic line itself.

The believer must learn this. God is not inactive simply because we are uninformed. God is not absent simply because we are hurting. God is not finished simply because we cannot imagine how the story could possibly end well. ***"For we walk by faith, not by sight"*** (2 Corinthians 5:7).

This does not mean every loss in this life is reversed the way Jacob's loss was reversed. Not every grieving father sees his son again on this side of eternity. Not every broken family gets a reunion in Goshen. Some griefs are carried all the way to the grave. Yet even in those cases, the

promise of God stands: ***"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"*** (Hebrews 13:5).

Joseph's story also points us to the Lord Jesus Christ. Not to retread ground from the previous chapter but when Jacob heard, ***"Joseph is yet alive,"*** and his spirit revived, we see that the message of the gospel is greater still: Jesus Christ is alive forevermore, and whoever believes on Him shall be quickened from spiritual death to everlasting life. ***"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)"*** (Ephesians 2:4-5).

The living Joseph meant bread for Jacob's starving house, whereas the living Christ means eternal life for every sinner who believes on Him. Joseph preserved physical life during a famine, while Christ gives everlasting life to all who trust Him. Joseph prepared a place for his family in Goshen, whereas Christ has gone to prepare a place for His people in heaven. ***"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you"*** (John 14:2).

Jacob saw the wagons and believed Joseph was alive. Meanwhile, we have the word of God declaring that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. The question is whether we will believe the testimony. The wagons are there. The evidence is real. The invitation stands.

Jacob said, ***"It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive."*** The believer can say far more: "It is enough; Jesus Christ is alive." His death paid the price. His resurrection is the proof. His word is sure. It is enough.

Jacob's grief was long, yet it was not the end of the story. Joseph's suffering was severe, yet it was not the end of the story. The brothers' sin was wicked, yet it was not beyond the reach of God's redeeming hand. ***"But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive"*** (Genesis 50:20).

THE PROMISES OF GOD

“And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years: so the whole age of Jacob was an hundred forty and seven years.” (Genesis 47:28).

Jacob lived in Egypt for seventeen years. The same number of years he had spent with Joseph before he was sold into slavery (Genesis 37:2). Seventeen years with his son in Canaan, seventeen years with his son in Egypt. Jacob was now very old, he was frail, and he leaned on a staff.

When the time came for Jacob to die, he called Joseph to his bedside and made a request that reveals a lot about him spiritually.

“And the time drew nigh that Israel must die: and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt: But I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their

buryingplace. And he said, I will do as thou hast said" (Genesis 47:29-30).

This was not the request of a man who was afraid of Egyptian burial customs. This was the request of a man who believed the promises of God. God had promised the land of Canaan to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. *That* land was the land of promise, not Egypt. Egypt was the land of provision, the place where God had sheltered and fed the family during the famine. It was a good land, but it was not the promised land.

Jacob wanted to be buried in the right place because he believed the promise was real. Even in death, he wanted his body to be in the land God had sworn to give his descendants. His bones would wait in Canaan for the fulfillment of the covenant. His burial was an act of faith.

Hebrews 11:13 says, speaking of the faith of the patriarchs: ***"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth"*** (Hebrews 11:13). Jacob died without seeing the fulfillment of the promise. He died in Egypt, not in Canaan. He died as a stranger and a pilgrim. Yet he was persuaded of the promise and embraced it. He ordered his burial accordingly.

This is what mature faith looks like. It does not demand that every promise be fulfilled before death. It trusts that God will keep His word even after the believer is gone. It makes arrangements based on conviction rather than convenience. It chooses the burial ground based on the promise, not the geography.

There is something else in this passage that deserves careful attention. Jacob asked Joseph to put his hand under his thigh and swear an oath. This was the most solemn form of oath-taking in the ancient world. Abraham had used the same gesture when he sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac. It was a pledge of the deepest possible gravity.

Jacob was entrusting his death to Joseph. He was placing the final chapter of his story, the disposition of his body, the location of his grave, in the hands of his son. He was trusting Joseph with the one thing a man cannot manage for himself: what happens after he dies.

This is a small picture of what every believer must do with Christ. We must entrust our death to Him. We cannot manage our own departure or arrange our own eternity. We must place ourselves in the hands of the One who has the power to carry us through death and into the eternal life He has promised to those who believe on Him.

Jacob trusted Joseph with his death because he knew Joseph loved him and had the power to fulfill the request. The believer trusts Christ with his death because he knows Christ loves him and has already conquered the grave. Joseph carried Jacob's bones out of Egypt, while Christ carries the believer safely through death and into everlasting life.

“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (1 Corinthians 15:55).

Jacob's burial request reminds us that Egypt was not home. Egypt had been a place of provision, but it was not the place of promise. God had fed him there, sheltered him there, and restored Joseph to him there, but Jacob's hope

was still fixed on Canaan. He could receive God's provision in Egypt without making Egypt his final resting place.

That is an important lesson for the believer. God may provide for us in this world. He may give us homes, families, work, friendships, food, shelter, and many mercies along the way. We should be thankful for every one of them, absolutely, but this world is not our home. We are strangers and pilgrims here. The child of God must not mistake the place of temporary provision for the place of eternal promise.

Jacob died in Egypt, but he died looking toward Canaan. He did not live to see his descendants possess the land. He did not see the nation formed, the Exodus accomplished, the Red Sea opened, or the walls of Jericho fall. Yet he believed God. Faith does not require God to fulfill every promise before our eyes before we trust Him. Faith believes that God will keep His word even after we are gone.

Jacob could not carry himself back to Canaan. He could not control what happened to his body after death. He could not manage the final chapter of his earthly story. So he entrusted it to Joseph. In a greater way, every sinner must entrust himself to Christ. We cannot carry ourselves through death. We cannot arrange our own eternity. We cannot save our own souls. We must place ourselves in the hands of the One who died for our sins, rose again, and has power over the grave.

So the chapter ends with an old man preparing to die, but not as a man without hope. His body was weak, but his faith was looking in the right direction. Egypt had been good to him, but Canaan had been promised to him. Joseph would carry his bones home while Christ will carry His people farther still.

THE PROMISES OF GOD

The God who keeps His promises in life can be trusted with death.

THE NAME YOU WERE GIVEN

Before Jacob died, he gathered his sons around his bed and blessed them. Each son received a word from the patriarch. Some of those words were blessings, some were corrections, some were prophecies that would shape the history of Israel for centuries to come. The schemer who once stole blessings through deception was now dispensing them with the authority of a man who had walked with God for a lifetime.

The greatest of these blessings was reserved for Joseph's sons. Joseph brought Manasseh and Ephraim to his father's bedside. He positioned them carefully, the older son under Jacob's right hand, the hand of the greater blessing, and the younger son under the left.

Jacob crossed his hands.

"And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his

hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the firstborn"
(Genesis 48:14).

He put the greater blessing on the younger son. Joseph objected as he thought his father had made a mistake. He tried to move the old man's hands but Jacob refused.

"And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it" (Genesis 48:19).

Jacob knew exactly what he was doing. He was not confused or senile. He was not repeating the mistakes of the past. He was, for the first time in his life, acting as a prophet rather than a schemer. He wanted God's way over man's expectation.

Jacob had lived this truth his entire life. He was born the younger, yet received the blessing of the firstborn. Not by his own scheming, in the end, but by the faithfulness of God who had declared it before either twin was born. Now, at the close of his days, the man who once grabbed for blessings was bestowing them. The crossed hands were not a trick, they were an act of faith. Jacob had learned, at last, to bless the way God blesses: not according to human expectation, but according to divine purpose.

Then came the prayer that reveals how far Jacob had come.

"And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads" (Genesis 48:15-16).

In these words, Jacob gives a threefold testimony of the Lord:

1. He is the God of Abraham and Isaac, the covenant-keeping God who keeps His promises from generation to generation.
2. He is the God who fed Jacob all his life long, the faithful provider who had cared for him from Canaan to Haran, from Haran back to Canaan, and from Canaan down into Egypt.
3. He is the Angel who redeemed him from all evil, the divine Redeemer who had delivered him again and again, even from troubles Jacob had brought upon himself.

This is the testimony of a man who has finally seen the whole picture. The Angel who appeared at Bethel on the stone pillow, who spoke in Haran during the long years of labor, who wrestled at Peniel and gave him a new name, who protected him from Esau, from Laban, from his own foolishness, and from the grief of losing Joseph, this Angel redeemed him from all evil. Every last piece of it.

The man who told Pharaoh that his days had been *"few and evil"* (Genesis 47:9) ends his life declaring that God had redeemed him from all evil. That is the transformation. That is the distance between Jacob and Israel. Earlier, he saw his life through the lens of his failures. Now he sees it through the lens of God's faithfulness. Earlier, his days were few and evil. Now, every one of those evil days has been redeemed.

There is great hope in this for the believer. You may look back over your life and see failures, foolish choices, wasted years, broken relationships, and consequences you wish you could undo. Jacob could have done the same. Yet the testimony of his old age was not, "I ruined everything." It was, *"The Angel redeemed me from all evil."* The

God of Jacob is able to take a life full of weakness and make it a testimony of grace. He is able to take the heel-grabber and make him a worshipper. He is able to take the schemer and make him a patriarch. He is able to take the man who once stole a blessing and make him a man who blesses others by faith.

Jacob's crossed hands also remind us that God's ways are not man's ways. Joseph thought he knew where the right hand should go. He had arranged the boys according to natural order, age, and expectation. However, Jacob knew what he was doing because he had learned something about God: He is not bound by human custom. God delights to overturn human expectations so that the glory belongs to Him.

That truth reaches all the way to the gospel. God did not save the world through the strength, wisdom, and glory of man. He saved sinners through a rejected, crucified Saviour. The world looks at the cross and sees weakness, shame, and defeat. God looks at the cross and shows wisdom, power, and salvation. ***“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God”*** (1 Corinthians 1:18). The crossed hands of Jacob point us to the greater reversal of the cross, where God brought life out of death and victory out of what looked like defeat.

This is the work God had been doing all along. Every chapter of Jacob's life had been used by God to bring him lower, not to destroy him, but to teach him dependence. The pottage, the goatskin, the stone pillow, the wrong bride, the years under Laban, the wrestling at Jabbok, the reunion with Esau, the sorrow of Shechem, the buried idols, the grief over Joseph, and the wagons from Egypt

were not disconnected events. They were tools in the hand of God. The Lord was patiently making Jacob into Israel.

That gives hope to the believer. Jacob was not changed in a moment, but over a lifetime. There were failures after Bethel. There were fears after Peniel. There were sorrows after his new name. Yet God kept His word. He had said, ***“I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of”*** (Genesis 28:15). At the end of Jacob’s life, that promise still stood. Jacob had not held on to God perfectly, but God had held on to Jacob faithfully.

There is also a warning here. Jacob’s life shows that sin brings sorrow. His schemes did not make his life easier. His deception did not bring peace. His favoritism wounded his family. His passivity brought trouble into his home. Grace was real, but so were consequences. The believer should not look at Jacob and think sin is harmless because God is merciful. God was merciful to Jacob, but Jacob himself testified that his days had been ***“few and evil.”*** A man may be saved by grace and still reap bitter harvests from fleshly choices.

Yet the final testimony of Jacob’s life is not sorrow, but redemption. The man who said his days were ***“few and evil”*** could also say, ***“The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads.”*** That is not a contradiction. That is grace. God had been greater than Jacob’s sin, greater than Laban’s cruelty, greater than Esau’s anger, greater than Joseph’s absence, and greater than every grief Jacob thought would break him.

That is where the story brings us. The need to be more was real, but Jacob could never make himself more. Every time he tried, he added sorrow. God had to break him, rename

him, lead him, correct him, preserve him, and teach him to receive by faith what he could never seize by strength. Jacob became more, not because he finally mastered life, but because God was faithful to him.

This is the only hope for us as well. We cannot scheme our way into righteousness. We cannot bargain our way into peace. We cannot disguise ourselves into acceptance. We cannot wrestle our way into the blessing by the strength of the flesh. We must come to the Lord as we are, guilty, needy, weak, and unable to save ourselves. We must receive what Christ has done.

You *must* be made new.

That is why you need Jesus Christ. He is the true and only Saviour. He died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. He does not merely improve men. He saves them. He does not merely polish Jacob, he makes Israel. He does not merely give a man better habits. He gives him life, forgiveness, righteousness, and a new identity before God.

So let Jacob's life be an example to us all. Stop grabbing, stop pretending, stop bargaining, stop trying to become by the flesh what only God can make you by grace.

The man who spent his life trying to be more finally learned that God's grace had been carrying him all along.

HAVE YOU BEEN BORN AGAIN?

We have walked through the life of Jacob from the womb to the deathbed. We have watched him grab, scheme, deceive, labor, fail, and grieve. We have watched God pursue him through every chapter, meeting him on stone pillows and at midnight wrestling matches, humbling him and giving him a new name. We have seen the heel-grabber become a worshipper.

The need to be more was real in Jacob's life. It is real in yours. Every honest person feels it. You look at your life and you know something is missing. You know there is a gap between what you are and what you were meant to be. You have tried to close that gap in your own strength, in your own way, on your own terms. Perhaps you have tried religion. Perhaps you have tried self-improvement. Perhaps you have tried simply working harder. None of it has been enough, because none of it was ever *meant* to be.

Jacob spent decades trying to be more through his own effort. God spent those same decades patiently bringing him to the end of himself. The lesson of Jacob's life is the

lesson of every human life: you cannot make yourself into what only God can make you. The transformation you need is not one you can manufacture. It must come from outside of you.

It must come from God.

That brings us to the most important question this book can ask. It is not a question about Jacob, but a question about you.

Have *you* been born again?

The Bible is clear about the condition of every person who has ever lived. ***"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"*** (Romans 3:23).

All have sinned. Not *most*, or the particularly wicked. Every person who has ever drawn breath has fallen short of God's standard of perfect righteousness. Jacob fell short. Esau fell short. You and I have fallen short.

Sin is not merely a collection of bad habits or poor decisions. It is a condition of the heart that separates us from a holy God. God is not *almost* holy, or *mostly* righteous. He is perfectly holy, perfectly pure, and perfectly just. One sin is enough to condemn a man before Him, because one sin is rebellion against the God who made him. ***"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all"*** (James 2:10).

That is why the problem is greater than most people imagine. Jacob's schemes, Esau's profanity, Laban's dishonesty, and our own sins all come from the same root: a heart that has turned from God to its own way. ***"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way"*** (Isaiah 53:6).

This is why self-improvement cannot save. A man may clean up part of his life and still remain guilty before God. He may become religious and still remain lost. He may quit certain sins and still have a heart that has never been made new. The issue is not whether you can become a better version of yourself. The issue is whether a holy God can receive you as righteous.

It is the reason the ladder at Bethel was necessary. The gulf between earth and heaven, between sinful man and righteous God, is infinite. We cannot cross it on our own. We cannot climb the ladder. We cannot work our way to the top of it. We cannot earn our way across the distance.

The consequence of that separation is severe. ***“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”*** (Romans 6:23). Death is what sin earns. Not just physical death, though that is part of it, but eternal separation from God. That is the paycheck every sinner has coming. Jacob earned it. You have earned it. I have earned it.

If the verse ended there, there would be no hope. But it continues with one of the most beautiful words in the English language: “but.” The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. One is earned, whereas the other is given.

But that gift was not cheap. It was purchased by the finished work of Jesus Christ. He did not come to offer mankind a discount on salvation. He did not come to make a deal where we contribute our good works and He makes up the difference. He came to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. On the cross, Christ took the sinner’s place. ***“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made***

the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The sinless Son of God bore the judgment that sinners deserved. He died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. When He cried, ***"It is finished,"*** the work of redemption was complete. Nothing needs to be added to it, and nothing can be added to it. God does not accept salvation on our terms. He accepts sinners on the basis of Christ's finished work.

The ladder Jacob saw at Bethel was a shadow of a greater reality. Jesus Christ is the ladder. He is the bridge between sinful man and holy God. He came down from heaven to earth so that sinful men and women could be reconciled to the God they had offended. He did not come because we deserved it, He came because we needed it.

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Notice this verse says: *while* we were yet sinners. Not after we cleaned ourselves up or earned His favor. Not after we put on a goatskin and pretended to be someone we are not. While we were sinners, stained and spotted and guilty, Christ died for us. He did not wait for us to climb the ladder ourselves, for we cannot. Instead, He came down.

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins

according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

See here that: (1) Christ died for our sins, (2) He was buried, (3) He rose again the third day. That is the gospel. Three facts. Three historical events that changed everything. Christ died, which means our sin has been paid for. He was buried, which means His death was real and complete. He rose again, which means the payment was accepted and the power of death was broken.

This is what Jacob's story has been pointing to all along. Jacob could not save himself. He could not earn his way into God's favor. He could not grab, scheme, or labor his way into righteousness. He needed God to come to him, to wrestle him, to break him, to rename him. The entire Old Testament is the story of a God who keeps reaching down to men who cannot reach up. Jesus Christ is the final, complete, perfect expression of that reaching. He is the ladder set up on the earth with its top reaching to heaven.

How does a person receive this gift? The Bible answers plainly:

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

That is the simplicity of the gospel. There is no goatskin to wear. There is no birthright to purchase. There are no fourteen years of labor to complete. There is no deal to negotiate. There is only the broken, honest, empty-handed

admission that you are a sinner who needs a Saviour, and the faith that Jesus Christ is that Saviour.

Remember Jacob at Peniel. All he could do was cling to God and say, **"I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."** God asked him his name, and for the first time in his life, Jacob told the truth. **"Jacob."** Supplanter. Heel-grabber. Schemer. That was his name. That was his history. That was his confession.

God did not reject that confession. He received it. He gave Jacob a new name. He called him Israel, which means prince with God.

The same God is asking you the same question right now. "What is thy name?" Not the name you show the world. Not the goatskin version of yourself. Your real name. Your real condition. Are you a sinner? Then say so. Are you stained? Then admit it. Are you broken? Then come as you are.

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13).

That word *whosoever* is wide enough to include everyone. It is wide enough for Jacob. It is wide enough for you. To call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is to come to Him in faith, acknowledging that you are a sinner and believing that He died for your sins, was buried, and rose again.

When He saves a sinner, He does more than keep that sinner out of hell. He brings him back to God. ***"But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ"*** (Ephesians 2:13). The one who was far off is brought near. The one who was guilty is forgiven, and the one who was stained is washed.

If you have never done that, you can do it right now. You do not need a church building. You do not need a priest. You do not need a ceremony. You do not need to recite a prayer I give you. You need the Lord Jesus Christ, and He is as near as your next breath. Call upon Him. Believe on the One who died for you and rose again. He will save you. He promised He would, and unlike Laban, God does not change His terms.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

