

## **Grace and Mercy in the Old Testament**

### **II. - Jacob and Divine Compassion**

***“He found him in a desert land, and in the waste hollowing wilderness; He led him about, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirreth up a nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and He made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock . . .”*** (Deuteronomy 32:10-13).

Jacob is a primary example of God’s compassion toward the people of earth. We often see God in the judgmental perspective, and indeed, He has a universe to run and must be left to handle it as He sees fit. We, of course, haven’t the slightest idea of how to run a universe and are at once mystified and distressed at how He manages it. If we get too personal or selfish about our demands upon Him—please have sunshine for our picnic—we lose sight of the much grander meaning of His ultimate intentions for His creation. We think His compassion runs in the line of making life lovely for us, whereas Jeremiah says that His compassion runs in the line of our not being consumed. Imagine the wonder of our being so integrated with God that we are partakers of His divine nature and will share His eternal purposes for the universe. This, of course, is the lot of those who choose to identify with Him and thus become members of His family. Nor is it confined to those who are “good children,” as we shall see with Jacob.

Jacob is a primary example of the course of God’s grace and mercy in the Old Testament. His destiny was to be the father of God’s people, Israel, and yet his early life had much of mischief in it. It was God’s intention for Jacob to have the birthright—that he should surpass his brother Esau. However, Jacob acquired the birthright through the exploitation of Esau in a certain crisis. He then conspired with his mother to deceive Isaac and confirm the birthright through trickery. In fear of Esau’s wrath, he then fled to Padan-Aram, to his uncle Laban. He and Laban were two of a kind and engaged in the deception of each other. Interestingly enough, the whole nation of Israel came, primarily, through Leah, who had been part of Laban’s trickery.

Subsequently, when Jacob began a return home, a series of events caused him to seek out the help of God. His encounter with the angel of God (possibly a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ) brought him to a confrontation of himself and a genuine experience of penitence. At this point his name was changed to Israel—“prince with God.” Throughout his entire life of wandering and fleshly failure, God saw him in the light of the text quoted above. Not that Jacob did not receive his disciplinary action from God, but through it all God dealt with him in compassion and mercy. There was never a time when God abandoned Jacob. Jacob was included in the “faith” chapter—Hebrews 11—even though his actions did not reflect what we regard as faith. The point is that faith, as we shall see throughout this series, is not a matter of human exercise of feelings, but of an energy process from God whereby He accomplishes His purposes in human beings on the earth.

It is important to understand that God’s actions and attitudes toward His people are the same throughout the entire Bible. The Ten Commandments were

an important standard of behavior for His people, but He was always quick to forgive their failures. And some of the most momentous purposes of God in the Bible were enacted through selected servants, such as Jacob, who had been flawed in their behavior patterns.

In the practical application, we find that the forgiveness and grace of God was as vital in the Old Testament as in the New. In fact, Jesus came through the line of David in which there was a most heinous sin in the birth of Solomon. Nor did the grace of God exclude the necessity of some very serious penalties. But the point is that these were all members of God's family energized by His power in the fulfilling of His purposes.

In the practical application today, while the grace of God has excluded the necessity of the rituals and sacrifices of the Old Testament, His attitude toward His people is the same—*“If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (I John 1:9). Human failures do not separate us from Christ. One may feel chagrined at one's behavior and tend to back away from Christ, but this is not necessary. If we back away from Christ, how shall we get help? And God Himself has said, as quoted in Hebrews 13:5—*“I will never leave you [let go of you] or forsake you [leave you alone in your circumstances].”* Once His Spirit has come into you, you belong to His family forever. The evidence is that you want to belong to His family. If our security rests in our own ability to hang on to God, we are all in great trouble. This is not to excuse misbehavior or to say that our conduct does not matter. It is only to give us confidence that we may always come to Christ and be accepted by Him, even though He may not be pleased with our behavior and sometimes must exercise discipline. Paul says in Philippians—*“Being confident of this very thing that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”* (1:6). And Jude says, *“Unto Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy . . .”* (v.24). He will never let go of you, so don't let go of Him.

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