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# THE GOD OF JACOB

A. W. PINK (1886-1952)

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*“The God of Jacob is our refuge.”*

—Psalm 46:7

This divine title—“The God of Jacob”—is found at least fourteen times in the Old Testament, and in addition, three times we read of “The mighty God of Jacob.” Such frequent repetition argues a deep significance, and suggests valuable lessons to be learned. We never read of the God of Moses, the God of Joshua, or the God of Solomon. Why then has God identified Himself with Jacob? What is there in the Lord’s dealings with this man which will suggest to us the import of this title? What is the particular significance of this expression which occurs and recurs through the Psalms like a familiar refrain?

### **1. The God of Jacob is the God of election.**

Jacob supplies us with the clearest and most unmistakable illustration of God’s sovereign choice to be met with in all the Bible. Whatever quibbles may be raised in reference to God’s choice of Abraham to be the father of the faithful, or of the nation of Israel to be the recipients of His peculiar favors, there is no getting round God’s election of Jacob. The case of Jacob gives the most emphatic refutation<sup>1</sup> to the theory that God’s choice is dependent upon something in the creature—something either actual or foreseen—and shows that the eternal election of certain individuals unto salvation is due to no worthiness in the subjects but results solely from God’s sovereign grace. The case of Jacob proves conclusively that God’s choice is entirely arbitrary,<sup>2</sup> wholly gratuitous<sup>3</sup>, and based upon nothing save His own good pleasure. “When Rebecca also

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<sup>1</sup> **refutation** – act of proving false or wrong.

<sup>2</sup> **arbitrary** – left to one’s judgment or choice, not fixed by rules.

had conceived by one, even our father Isaac (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (Rom 9:10-13). *The God of Jacob then is the God who chooses one, and passes by another. He is the One who exercises and exhibits His own sovereign will.* He is one who shows Himself to be the Most High ruling in heaven and earth and disposing of his creatures according to His own eternal purpose. He is the One who singles out the most unlikely and unworthy objects to be fashioned into vessels of glory. Yet, He is the One who necessarily acts always in harmony with His own perfections. **Election is not as some have supposed, harsh and unjust, but is a most merciful provision on the part of God. Had he not from the beginning chosen SOME to salvation, ALL would have perished.** Had he not before the foundation of the world chosen certain ones to be conformed to the image of His Son, the death of Christ would have been in vain so far as the human race is concerned. Reduced to its simplest terms, election means that God chose me before I chose Him. Said our Lord, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you” (Joh 15:16). We love Him because **He first** loved us. Election means that before I was born, yea, before the foundation of the world, I was chosen in Christ and predestinated unto a place in God’s family. Election means that we believed because He made us willing in the day of His power. **Election then strips the creature of all merit, removes all ground of boasting, strikes us helpless in the dust, and ascribes all the glory to God.**

## 2. The God of Jacob is the God of all grace.

If ever there was a man who illustrated in his own person that God hath chosen the “base things of the world, things which are despised” (1Cor 1:28), it was Jacob. According to the flesh there was nothing winsome or attractive about him. Selfish, scheming, deceitful, treacherous, untruthful, he was a most unlovely character. What was there in him to attract the love of God? Absolutely nothing. We should have thought that Esau was a fitter subject for God’s favors. But God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways. Spiritual things are hidden from the wise and prudent and are revealed unto babes. Self-righteous Pharisees are passed by, while publicans and harlots are constrained to partake of the Gospel banquet. The rich are ignored, while to the poor the Gospel is preached. Esau is hated while the “worm” Jacob is loved with an everlasting and unfathomable love.

The full force of this divine title, “The God of Jacob”, can only be apprehended by a careful study of the patriarch’s experiences. The first time we see God entering his life is that memorable night at Bethel. A fugitive from his father’s house, fleeing from his brother’s wrath, with probably no thought of God in his mind at all, the son of Isaac “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” (Gen 28:11). As we see him there, asleep on the bare ground, we get striking picture of man in his natural state. Man is never so helpless as when asleep! It was while he was in this condition that God appeared to him, and said, “I am the 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; 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” (Gen 28:13,15). The God of Jacob then, is the God who met Jacob while he had nothing, and deserved nothing but wrath, and who gave him everything. Happy indeed are they who have such a God for their God.

## 3. The God of Jacob is the God of infinite patience.

A careful study of the whole life of Jacob as it is recorded in Genesis is necessary to discover the whole force of this fact. We can now only call attention to the leading events in that life, leaving our readers to work out the details for themselves. To say that Jacob was naturally a most despicable character, and that as a believer he lived a most God-dishonoring life, is only to state a fact which is well known to all Bible students. What we desire to particularly emphasize in this connection is the continued and marvelous forbearance of God in dealing with His wayward child. At the hour of his birth God made known the fact that Jacob was to have the firstborn’s portion. Yet, instead of waiting God’s own good time and way to secure for him his inheritance, Jacob resorted to ignoble and underhand methods to obtain it for himself.

The picture presented in Genesis 27 is truly a pathetic one. In brief, the facts were as follows: God announced to Rebecca that Esau was to serve his younger brother, Jacob, which was the equivalent of saying that the place and portion of the firstborn was promised by God to Jacob. Now Esau was Isaac’s favorite son and he rebelled against the idea of Jacob being exalted above him. He thereupon conceives a plot. In the time of his old age he calls Esau to him, speaks of his approaching death, bids his son prepare food for him and at the same time purposes to give him the patriarchal blessing. The hurry and secrecy which marked his actions reveal a determined effort to thwart the purpose of God and to transfer the blessing to his older son. Though Esau must have been acquainted with the divine purpose and though he had actually sold his inheritance to Jacob at an earlier date, yet, seeing an opportunity to recover and regain his lost birthright, he readily falls in with his father’s plan. But Rebecca, with whom Jacob was the favorite, had overheard Isaac’s plot, so she sets out to neutralize it with a counter-plot. She is determined to preserve for Jacob the blessing which Jehovah had promised him. She felt a great

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<sup>3</sup> gratuitous – without cause or qualification.

wrong was about to be done her favorite; she imagined the purpose of God was in danger; she believed that wrong means would justify a right end. Having laid her plans, she takes Jacob into her confidence, and instructs him how to proceed in order to get the better of Esau. Now what ought Jacob to have done? Clearly, it was a sore trial of faith. God's promise seemed about to fail: apparently His purpose was to be defeated. There was only one right course for him to follow, and that was to lay the whole matter before God and supplicate<sup>4</sup> His aid. Man's extremities are God's opportunities. But God was not in his thoughts; he had more confidence in fleshly means, and therefore he agreed to carry out his mother's scheme.

It is important to note here that Jacob's fall was no mere succumbing to a sudden and unexpected temptation. The twelfth verse of Genesis 27 unmistakably brings out the fact that the deception which Jacob practiced upon his father was a deliberate and premeditated act. He clearly saw the sin of it in the sight of God, and feared that the might bring down upon him the divine curse, yet, nevertheless, he defiantly complies with his mother's suggestions. His preparations were quickly and cleverly made, and the food which his mother had prepared is brought to his father. He boldly declares that he is the firstborn, lie follows lie, Isaac is completely deceived, and Jacob obtains the blessing. The sequel is well known. The plot is uncovered, the deception is unveiled, Esau's anger is kindled, and Jacob flees for his life.

It is at this point that the marvelous grace and patience of our God appears. On the first night of his absence from home God reveals Himself in a vision to Jacob and promises Himself to be with the fugitive, to protect him wherever he goes, and to bring him back again into the promised land. Jacob's response to these gracious declarations reveals the conditions of his heart: "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" (Gen 28:20-21). This vow which Jacob made well reveals the bargaining spirit of the man, and shows how little he knew of the character of God.

Passing over the years which he spent upon the farm of his father-in-law, we note the next appearance of God to Jacob. "And the Lord said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee" (Gen 31:3). Years before, on the night when He was first revealed to him, God promised to bring His erring child back again to the land of promise. No doubt an intense longing had filled Jacob's heart throughout his exile. The time had come for God to commence the fulfillment of His promise. He reveals to Jacob that it was now His will that Jacob start on his homeward journey. Once more God assures him that He will be with him. What is Jacob's response to this? His first thought was to secure the wages which were due him from Laban—wages which were in the form of cattle and sheep, many of which had been gotten by a trick. His next thought was to steal away secretly. Instead of telling his father-in-law that God had commanded him to return to Canaan, "**he stole away unawares**" (v. 20) taking with him "**the cattle of his getting which, he had gotten in Padan-Aram**" (v. 18). Confidence in God was altogether lacking; faith in His gracious promises was a negative quantity; and his conduct was most unworthy and unbecoming in one so highly favored by Jehovah.

"And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of this place Mahanaim" (Gen 32:1-2). This was one of God's tender mercies and provisions for the way: a long and difficult journey lay before Jacob, and thus the Lord assures His child that angels are his attendants. But no sooner have these heavenly visitants appeared and disappeared than Jacob forgets all about them and acts as though they had no existence. "And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak to my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus; I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: and I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and men servants, and women servants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight" (vv. 3-5).

As he journeys toward the land of Canaan memory revives and conscience is at work. He thinks of the brother he has wronged and is afraid. You may say that was quite natural. True, had Jacob been an unbeliever. But God had promised to be with him and bring him back again into the land of his fathers, and **He** was well able to deal with Esau. But again we see that God was not in his thoughts. He had more confidence in his own wisdom and devices than in divine aid. The message which he sent to Esau was utterly beneath the dignity of a child of God: such fawning phrases as "my lord Esau" and "thy servant Jacob" tell their own sad tale. But Jacob's hopes are disappointed. No friendly greeting comes from Esau; on the contrary, there are indications that he has designs upon his brother's life. Esau was coming to meet Jacob, **and with him four hundred men**. Jacob is now thoroughly afraid: "And Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and the herds, and the camels, into two bands; and said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape" (vv. 7-8). Instead of casting himself upon the Lord, he at once begins to plan and scheme. Having completed his plans, he then turns unto God and supplicates His aid. Alas! How true to human nature. Scarcely had he risen from his knees, than once more he leans upon the arm of flesh. Esau's host drove out of his mind "the host of God." Having divided his party and possessions into two companies, so that in case one was attacked and destroyed the other might escape, and thus a part at least be spared, Jacob then prepares and sends on ahead a costly present for Esau, that by this means his brother's wrath might be appeased (vv. 13-20). Thus instead of allow-

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<sup>4</sup> **supplicate** – to ask for humbly and earnestly.

ing God to manage Esau, Jacob by his obsequious<sup>5</sup> cringing seeks to buy his brother's favor. Truly, "The fear of man bringeth a snare" (Pro 29:25).

But the above only provides a dark background upon which may shine forth the riches of divine grace. In spite of all his unbelief, lack of confidence in God, and trust in himself, Jehovah once more appears to His servant, this time in the form of a man who wrestled with Jacob all night (Gen 32:24-30). Even so, Jacob has still to learn that "Whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe" (Pro 29:25). The actual meeting with Esau still had to be faced, and when the crisis is reached the old Jacob once more came to the fore. As Esau approached him, seven times Jacob bowed himself to the ground (33:3)—what an unbecoming position to take, for one occupying the relationship to God which Jacob enjoyed. The excessive deference<sup>6</sup> here shown to the brother he had wronged betokened<sup>7</sup> to servile fear. The generous way in which Esau acted put Jacob to shame. He showed himself quite friendly toward this brother, in fact anxious to help him. How often the children of God compare unfavorably with the children of the world!

Esau suggests that the two companies unite, and that they journey together to the old home. Jacob meets this generous proposal in a very characteristic way, and by means of a plausible excuse cleverly declined it. Fear still possessed him. Esau's mood perhaps might change. The old enmity might awaken. Jacob therefore suggests that Esau go on ahead, while he with his children and flocks come along more slowly in the rear. He promises to meet him at Seir (33:14). But no sooner had Esau and his four hundred men departed than Jacob deliberately journeys in the opposite directions, and went and settled in Succoth. Thus by his lying and treachery, once more Jacob dishonored the Lord. Moreover, Jacob did not content himself with temporary stay in Succoth; he built him a house there, evidently purposing to abide in that place. This act of his was not only a wrong done to Esau, but was in defiance of God's plain command "Return to the land of thy fathers" (Gen 31:3). "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound" (Rom 5:20). The more unworthy the subject the more is God's grace glorified.

In spite of Jacob's waywardness and wickedness, in spite of his distrust and disobedience, in spite of his repeated failures, God still deals with him in mercy. "And God appeared unto Jacob *again*, when he came out of Padan-Aram, and blessed him. 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. And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins. And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, *to thee will I give it*, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land" (Gen 35:9-12).

How incomparable is God's patience! How infinite is His forbearance! How matchless is His grace! Jacob is a pattern case. Unless our eyes be dim, we cannot help but see in the sad history of the old patriarch a faithful description of our own characters. Our experience is very much like his. The evil heart of unbelief abides in us, and only too often regulates the life of the believer. Like Jacob, we are ever planning and scheming, and then asking God's blessing upon our devices. As with Jacob, God has appeared to us again and again, cheered us with His promises, delivered us out of the hand of the enemy, guided us by His Spirit, protected us with His angels, yet we continue to grieve and dishonor Him. We are slow to learn. Fresh crises invariably result in fresh failures. But blessed be His name, Jacob's God is our God. He bears with us in infinite patience. He suffers our dullness with wondrous forbearance. He never leaves us nor forsakes us. He is with us to the end. Happy, thrice happy, they who can say, "The God of Jacob is our refuge."

#### **4. The God of Jacob is the God of transforming power.**

"At evening time it shall be light" (Zec 14-7). The sunset of Jacob's life reveals the triumph of God's mighty grace. In the closing scenes of his life we see the spirit victorious over the flesh. Not only is it deeply interesting to study closely the last pages of the patriarch's biography, but they bring before us the marvelous transforming effects of God's power. "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. 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. And Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die" (Gen 45:25-28). At first, the news that Joseph was alive seemed too good to be true, but the wagons he had sent to reassure his father convinced him; Jacob's spirit revived and he at once set out on the journey to Egypt. It is beautiful to note that the first thing recorded after the journey was begun was an act of worship on the part of the aged patriarch: "And Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba *and offered sacrifices* unto the God of his father Isaac" (46:1). Long years of discipline in the school of experience had at last taught him to put God first. Ere he goes down to Egypt he worships the God of his father Isaac! At once God met him, and said, "Jacob, Jacob." Note the ready response: "Here am I" (46:2). No need now to send an angel; Jacob had learned to recognize the voice of God himself.

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<sup>5</sup> **obsequious** – showing too great a willingness to serve or obey.

<sup>6</sup> **deference** – submission.

<sup>7</sup> **betokened** – indicated; showed in advance.

Another scene brings out the remarkable change which divine grace wrought in Jacob's character. "And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh" (Gen 47:7). The aged and feeble patriarch is brought before the monarch of the mightiest empire in the world. And what dignity now marks Jacob! What a contrast to the day when he bowed himself seven times before Esau! There is no cringing and fawning here. Jacob takes the true place of a child of God. He is the son of the King of Kings, an ambassador of the Most High. Brief is the record, yet how much the words suggest: "And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of *my pilgrimage* are an hundred and thirty years" (v. 9). At last Jacob had learned that his home was not here, that he was but a stranger and sojourner on the earth. He sees now that his life is but a journey, with a starting-point and a goal: the starting point, conversion; the goal, heavenly glory.

"And the time drew near 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 burying place" (Gen 47:29-30). Once more we see the evidences of the change which had been wrought in Jacob. This request of his not to be buried in Egypt but in Canaan, carries with it far more than appears on the surface. God had promised, many years before, to give Jacob and his seed the land of Canaan, and now the promise is embraced. Jacob had never possessed the land, and now he is dying in a strange country. But he knows God's Word is true, and his faith evidently looks forward to resurrection. At last the easily besetting sin (unbelief) is laid aside and faith triumphs. This is confirmed by the words which immediately follow: "And he swear unto him. And Israel *bowed* himself upon the bed's head" (Gen 47:31), the word "bowed" signifying worship. "By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshiped, leaning upon the top of his staff" (Heb 11:21). The account of this is found in Genesis 48. All through this chapter we see how God was now in all Jacob's thoughts, and how His promises are the stay of his heart. He recounts to Joseph how God had appeared to him at Luz (v. 14) and how He had promised to give the land of Canaan to him and his seed for an everlasting possession. He spake of God as the One who "fed me all my life long unto this day" (v. 15), and as the One "who redeemed me from all evil." Setting aside the inclinations of the flesh, and the will of man (Joseph's own desire), Jacob bows to God's will and *by faith* blesses Joseph's sons, setting "Ephraim before Manassah" (v. 20). After blessing Joseph's sons, Jacob turns to their father and says, "Behold, I die; but God shall be with you. and bring you again unto the land of your fathers" (v. 21). How unlikely this appeared! Joseph was now thoroughly settled and established in Egypt. No longer is Jacob walking by sight. Firm now was his confidence, and with an unshaken faith he grasps the promises of God (that his seed *shall* inherit Canaan) and speaks out of a heart filled with a quiet assurance.

The last scene, Genesis 49, presents a fitting climax, and demonstrates the power of God's grace. The whole family is gathered about the dying patriarch, and one by one he blesses them. All through his earlier life, Jacob was occupied solely with himself; but at the end he is occupied solely with others! In days gone by he was mainly concerned with planning for things present, but now (see Genesis 49:1) he has thought for nothing but things future! One word here is deeply instructive: "I have *waited* for thy salvation, O Lord" (49:18). We saw at the beginning of his life that waiting was something quite foreign to his nature: instead of waiting for God to secure for him the promised birthright, he sought to obtain it himself. But now the hardest lesson of all has been learned. Grace has taught him now to *wait*. Verily, "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth *more and more* unto the perfect day" (Pro 4-18)!

To sum up: God took Jacob as the one through whom he could best show forth His grace and power. What more suited for the display of His grace than the chief of sinners! Whom shall He take up to exhibit His power but the one who by nature was the most intractable!<sup>8</sup> And the God of Jacob is *our* refuge. He is the God of sovereign election, the God of matchless grace, the God of infinite patience, the God of transforming power. This is the One "with whom we have to do." Those of us who have already "passed from death unto life" already know something of His wondrous grace and marvelous forbearance. May we experience more and more of His mighty transforming power.



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<sup>8</sup> **intractable** – not to be governed; stubborn.