

Genesis - Commentaries by J.C. Bayley

Scripture Imagery, Scripture Imagery: 32. The Three Flocks, Leah, Rachel, the Servant (29:7-10)

Resuming the view of Jacob as typical of Christ in his earthly character, we find him come to the people of the East, where there are "three flocks" waiting around a well which is as yet closed. When it is "high day" he1 opens the well and the waiting sheep are supplied. Isaiah prophesies of the future time when "Israel shall be third with Egypt and Assyria,.....whom the Lord of Hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hand, and Israel mine inheritance." "And thither were all the flocks gathered"—Jew, Gentile, and Church of God—at least these three nations are evidently marked for special recognition and favor.

But for one of them is still more especial favor. Of Israel it is said, "Thy Maker is thine husband," "saith the Lord; for I am married unto thee: "2 so here we find the type in Rachel, so long wooed yet withheld, so long barren, so long idolatrous,3 so great a cause of sorrow and anxiety, and yet so greatly and ceaselessly beloved. We must remember that it is the course of the earthly Messiah which we are regarding here, and therefore it is in entire consistency that Rachel is the one on whom the chief care and affection seems to be bestowed. Leah (who is regarded as typifying the Gentile) was the first obtained, but was not the first sought, and here, in connection with the earthly Messiah and earthly dispensations, it is seen in a somewhat secondary light. For all that she is the most fruitful, and is honored in the births of Judah and Levi, the Ruler and the Teacher, King and Priest.

If Leah typified the Gentile, it is not surprising that we should read that she was "tender-eyed;" the organs of outward vision were impaired. In this dispensation we walk "by faith and not by sight." It is a saying as old as Plato,⁴ that "when our bodily eyes are at worst, generally the eyes of our souls see best." Democritus was blind, yet he "saw more than all Greece besides" (if he saw half as much as his namesake, Democritus junior, it is easy to believe that statement). "Some philosophers and divines," says this last-named, "have put out their eyes voluntarily, the better to contemplate." Who has heard such lofty anthems, as the two blind musicians Handel and Bach? who has seen such ecstatic visions as the two blind poets Homer and Milton? Leah would appear to have been neither particularly favored either in respect of outward appearance or outward vision; but from the little we read of her, in regard to naming her children, she seems to have had much inward and devout perception. This is what should be all true of the church in its earthly history, like its Lord having no beauty to the outward man that it should be desired; and characteristically and peculiarly-walking by faith and not by sight.⁵

Faith should be of course characteristic of the devout in any dispensation, but there is no dispensation in which it is so emphatically necessary that men should not walk by sight as in this, the church era: for even Israel had to take some cognizance of the providential and national movements around them, and shape their policy to some extent accordingly. But now we are told, "Ye are not of the world." "Set your affection—or regard, or mind, τὰ ἄνω φρονεῖτε—on things above." It is well to be accurate here: walking by sight does not mean the exercise of reason, sight refers to the outward evidences of mere external things, and may be contrary to faith, as every day we find it may be contrary to reason; for instance, if we look down over the bulwarks of a ship in progress, sight tells us that the water is rushing to the rear and our ship is stationary, but reason convinces us that it is the ship that moves and not the water. Reason—true reason not mere "reasoning"—never can contradict faith but travels in the same line, though in an infinitely lower plane. However much it is condemned in theological writings, the exercise of reason is nowhere condemned in the scriptures, where it is said, "Come, let us reason together," and that Paul "reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath."

A powerful opponent⁶ of Christianity says in a sarcastic passage, "Our most holy religion is founded on faith, not on reason; and it is a sure method of exposing it, to put it to such a trial [the trial of reason], as it is by no means fitted to endure." This foolish kind of attack no doubt has got some encouragement from well-intentioned persons who spend their time in reasoning against the use of reason, as if it were not God's very best providential gift. Nor is sight itself to be condemned; is that not also a divine gift? It is the walking by it that is condemned, for it is a mere "dead reckoning," and no sailor would travel by such means—that is, by calculation from the log and the steerage, when there is a single star visible in the heavens to guide him.

But in order to effect this union Jacob has to serve through weary years of bondage: he is a typical servant too, in some small sense not unworthy to foreshadow Him "Who took on Him the form of a servant." He submits to the wrongs of an injurious master in silence, he serves patiently, and suffers without complaint, his wages are changed ten times but he answers not again.⁷ Meanwhile the discipline that characterizes his life is steadily developing its effects. "God hath one Son without sin," said St. Austin, "but none without discipline."

Scripture Imagery, Scripture Imagery: 20. Isaac; the Question, the Sacred Names (22:7)

"And they went both of them together," but the progress seems to have been a silent one from the form of expression following Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son." And now the son asks a question—the question of all time; the cosmic question, uttered and echoed by the myriad tongues of the groaning creation— "Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb?"

Here are the implements of judgment, but where is the Victim; here is the need but where is the supply; here is the sinner, but where is the Savior; here is the worshipper, but where is the means of approach; here are the agencies of suffering, but where is the Sufferer? Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the Lamb? This was for four thousand years the inquiry—more or less mutely and imperfectly expressed—of every devout man; and there was but one answer that could be given, "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb." Faith gave that answer with

placid assurance, not doubting nor questioning—nor understanding; and faith received it with silent submission. The full answer and explanation came, however, at last; came when, at the end of a worn-out and dying dispensation, the aged Simeon held the celestial Babe in his arms and said, “Lord now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation;” came, when the stern and ascetic Baptist, looking upon Jesus as He walked, said, “BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD!”

So it is found that “in the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided “1; and so the place is named JEHOVAH-JIREH. The name Jehovah was taken by God as showing the relationship which He would maintain by faith: it means I AM2 and whatever is needed can be, by faith, added to that “I am—.” It is like a signed check which is left for the possessor to fill in the amount as he requires. Thus we find the word Jehovah linked with qualifying terms several times, and on each occasion the qualifying term grows out of the character of the circumstances and suits it. In the passage before us, there is a position of extreme need—Where is.....? and therefore we find JEHOVAH-JIREH, I am thy provider. In Ex. 17, the people of Israel, unorganized and undisciplined, was attacked by a powerless and ruthless foe; and they required a rallying point, a banner, JEHOVAH-NISSI. Again, in the beginning of the book of Judges, the position is one of continual turbulence: in the sixth chapter “the mighty man of valor” was threshing “a handful of wheat by the winepress “to hide it from the Midianites.” When he sees the departing angel, he cries in an agony of fear, “Alas, O Lord God!” But the Lord said, “Peace fear not:” so the name of the altar is JEHOVAH-SHALOM =I am thy peace. Then in Jer. 23 the sin complained of is so great that the very pastors are seen to be wholly corrupt— “Woe be unto the pastors!” there is no hope when the rulers have thus become vile, until a heavenly light shines forth from the well-known and well-loved words JEHOVAH TSIDKENU.

Finally observe the beautiful suitability of the last of these qualifying terms. Ezekiel3 gives a very long description of the holy temple of the future; he describes the surroundings and furniture in the glorious words of his book. What is it but the house without the father, the home without the husband, the palace without the king? He describes, indeed, many grandeurs of the millennial temple, spacious, solemn, rich, brilliant, superb in its splendor and imposing magnificence; but only to lead to this, the zenith and culmination of all its manifold glories JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH, or, THE LORD IS THERE.

And, to the devout mind, unless the Lord be there, its beauty is ugliness and its glory is shame; and on the other hand the humblest position is, by the presence of the Lord, transformed and illumined as with the golden light of heaven. This is what has taken place at the first coming of Christ. He turned His back upon the earthly temple, and sat with His disciples in an “upper room.” When king David was betrayed, dishonored, and turned out of Jerusalem, those who were loyal to him and loved him went with him across Kidron and up the bleak mountainside. They preferred the king to the palace—wherever he was, was their palace; but there was no lack of time-servers then, as now, who remained behind, preferring the palace to the king, and were ready to welcome any usurper that would leave them their places. The time has been and will be again when the Lord would be found in temples of outward splendor, but not now; “Let us go forth, therefore, unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.”

Observe that faith goes forward, not understanding how the provision will be made, but reckoning on God's aid— “so they went both of them together.” A negro being in a difficulty to define faith, said, “Now see dat wall; well, if I prays to go froo dat ar wall, if I has faif, it's my business to jump at de wall, an' it's de Lord's business to put me froo.” But if he did not go forward, nobody could expect him to get through. Real faith always gets what it expects, and more. Abraham said, “God shall provide a lamb;” but when the time came, he “lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold behind him a ram.”

That was a good reply given by the mother of one who, coming down in the morning, swung open the cupboard door and said, “There, I prayed for a loaf of bread to be in the cupboard; and there's none, of course, just what I expected.” The mother replied, “Then you got what you expected!” Unbelief also gets what it expects—nothing.

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