

## The Jacob Story and the Seven Days of Creation

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Having just completed a series of sermons on the Jacob story in Genesis, many of you will be familiar with what has been described as a series of “shifts” from one perspective to another as we change from being naturally focused and motivated to being spiritually focused and motivated. The series included 7 steps or stages, which calls to mind other series in Scripture involving 7 step progressions, such as the 7 days of creation, the 7 years of plenty followed by 7 of famine in Joseph’s dreams, the 7 seals of the scroll, the 7 churches and the 7 plagues in the book of Revelation, not to mention many other references to 7 periods throughout the Word.

Today we will be considering how the 7 stages in the Jacob story can be seen in the story of creation, the very first and most ancient story in the Word, the one that sets the stage for everything that follows. So we’re going to be weaving the two stories together...

First, let’s recall the 7 days in order: -

1. Light, and the distinction of light from darkness;
2. The Firmament and the distinction of “waters above” from the “waters below”;
3. Dry land and the first appearance of vegetation: grass, herbs, trees and so on;
4. The sun, moon and stars appear;
5. The birds and fish;
6. Animals and people;
7. The day of rest, a holy day.

Thinking about this literally, you can see a natural progression from the creation of environments or atmospheres to the creation of the things that relate to those environments. You might imagine two columns, with three rows in each column. In the first column you have light, then water, including the watery atmosphere, then the land with plants which will provide food for the higher forms of life that come later. In the second column you have the specific focal points of light: the sun, moon and stars; then the birds and fish that inhabit the “waters above” and “beneath” the firmament; and finally you have the animals and man, inhabiting and making use of everything else that has been created. It’s not exactly “evolution,” but you can certainly see the progression of things from lower, more elemental forms to higher, more complex forms of life. It all goes in orderly stages, each one preparing and providing for the next – with, perhaps, the curious exception of light, which appears before the sun.

As with all the stories of Scripture, however, the real meaning is not in the literal sense but in the symbolism as it relates to our spiritual lives. And in the spiritual sense we see essentially the same concepts that we saw in the Jacob story. In the beginning we are like Rebekah having twins – Jacob and Esau. This represents the state of the rational or spiritual mind as it descends into natural thought and affection, that is, thought and affection about life in the world. Jacob represents that thought and Esau that affection. And just as the earth in the creation story is without form, and void, and full of darkness, so in the beginning our thoughts and affections are without form, and void, and full of darkness because we don’t yet know properly how to live in this world. Furthermore the twins struggle within Rebekah’s womb, representing the struggle be-

tween thought and affection in our lives: will we follow our heads or our hearts? Are we going to be reasonable or are we going to be free? - the two states often seem incompatible.

We have everything to learn. But then the twins are born and there is light, at least a general light or *enlightenment* by means of which we can see to begin to discern truth from falsity in the way we approach life. However the focus quickly narrows to Jacob and the principle of thought or understanding. He robs Esau of his birthright and his blessing and takes off for Haran where he will eventually acquire great wealth and a big family. This represents the acquisition of knowledge, specifically the goods and truths of faith, *but he's not there yet*. On the way he stops at a place called Bethel where he dreams of a staircase going up into heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it. Up, down; up, down – the relationship between the natural and the spiritual world.... This is at least reminiscent of the waters above and the waters beneath: two distinct levels of truth, one that has to do with heavenly realities and one that has to do with those of the world. And so we have the second day of creation, the second stage of our spiritual development, when we begin to understand this distinction AND to see the connection between the two levels. It's not enough just to think lofty thoughts, nor is it sufficient to think only about practical, worldly matters. The two are connected, just as the water in the atmosphere is distilled by evaporation from the waters on the earth, and then falls again as rain to replenish the earth. We need both – not just the water but the practical and spiritual truths that nourish our minds.

And what of the third day? In the creation story we read about the appearance of dry land and various forms of vegetation, the first living things. In the Jacob story we read about his attraction to Rachel and the way she served him, both with water from the well and, ultimately, her own and her father's hospitality. The connection between the two stories here is the growing affection for knowledge and understanding. It is one thing to SEE that a thing is so, and quite another to develop an affection for it. In the creation sequence the first living things represent the first real affections we begin to feel for the spiritual life. After all, love, or affection, is what really lives in us, or, to put it another way, we really feel alive when we can act on our affections.

Curiously, the word, land, does not actually appear in the Hebrew text. It is simply “the dry.” But out of this “dry,” or dryness, which refers to the persistence of selfish concerns that make the spiritual life seem dry or tedious, there does eventually arise a real feeling for the good of charity, if only on account of the blessings it offers us. Enter the lovely Rachel with all her promise of blessing and fulfillment for Jacob. What would he not do for this beautiful woman! 7 years of hard work go by as if they were “but a few days.” And so in our lives when we have a passion for something good and true we throw ourselves into it and work hard for the expected reward.

But in the end it is still all about Jacob. And the reward is NOT what he expects! Instead of Rachel when the time comes he is given the weak-eyed older sister, Leah. Now Leah is indeed a flawed character, but she immediately begins to bear children for Jacob. And his wealth grows in Haran, with a tremendous increase in flocks and herds, male and female servants, and so on, even as he continues to work even more passionately – and shrewdly – for Rachel.

Can we see the parallel in the creation story? I think so. The fourth day, representing the fourth stage of our spiritual development, is marked by the appearance of the sun, the moon and all the stars – greater light to rule by day and lesser light to rule by night. The sun represents love to the Lord, who is now known and recognized as the source of light, the moon represents faith in Him,

and the stars represent the innumerable insights that testify of Him and give us guidance in our spiritual lives. In the creation story these sources of natural light in the sky now provide focal points of the general sphere of light that was created on the first day and make it specific so that we can get our bearings from them and know what direction we are or should be going.

In the other story Jacob may not have had any great love for the Lord but he sure loved Rachel, who *represented* the truths of His Word, and he had faith in the Lord (Jehovah) to help him win her away from Laban, and all his growing natural wealth represented the same wealth of spiritual knowledge as do the stars in the sky – knowledge that gives us spiritual focus and direction.

We may feel for Jacob in that he did not get Rachel as Laban had agreed, and we may feel for Leah in that she was not whom he wanted but rather like a *consolation prize*. Still, the wealth accumulates and the family grows, and he is eventually given Rachel. So it is for us in the fourth day of our creation: – knowledge and understanding grow; faith in the Lord and love for His Word grows; we are really getting somewhere in our spiritual lives. And now it is time for the next big step: we have to leave Haran and go back to Canaan.

Since Haran is the land of Jacob's ancestry it represents the selfish, worldly heredity that we all inherit and that we all have to overcome as we enter into spiritual life. We can see this in Laban, the opportunist. At some point in our spiritual growth we have to recognize that self centered motives aren't really helping us anymore; we can't get to heaven always chasing rewards; there will never be enough. We have to move on and start acting from a higher conscience, a higher set of standards, returning figuratively to the Promised Land.

But how does this relate to the fifth day, the filling of the waters above and the waters below with birds and fish? Well, these now are the more *living* representatives of knowledge and understanding – not just points of intellectual enlightenment but real, spiritual insights that inspire us to quit learning for its own sake and start using what we have learned to serve the Lord. Indeed, fish and birds are both sources of nourishment for us, and as such represent the nourishing qualities of *selfless* knowledge and understanding *inspired* by the Lord.

To be sure, Jacob himself was not selfless, but in heeding the angel of God, leaving Haran and returning to Canaan he *represented* the conscience and discipline we need to take the Lord's direction rather than just working for ourselves. So the goods and truths we have acquired in a sphere of competition, striving to better ourselves at others' expense, now come to life as genuine truths preparing us for heaven. It's OK that our motives haven't been so great until now; the Lord knows we need time and experience to shift from our worldly ways to a more principled life. But the time comes when we know we must move on.

The next step or stage is Jacob's journey from Haran down to the southern part of Canaan, punctuated by the dramatic incident of his wrestling, alone, all night, with "a man," apparently an angel. It is at this point that he is given a new name, Israel, and a new appreciation for the mercy and providence of God. He is, perhaps, exhausted, and certainly humbled as he takes up his journey to meet his estranged brother, Esau.

But how does *this* relate to the sixth day of creation? Well, it may not be a perfect parallel, but it fits in the series, as the sixth day is about the creation of animals and man. These land-based

“living creatures” represent the affections of the will in a more advanced, more interior state than that of the understanding alone. Even “man” – male and female – is not just a reference to people but to the spiritual qualities that make us what we are – spiritual beings with a will and understanding that can overcome the limitations of the world and live forever. And here we see especially the emphasis on a new will, a new appreciation and affection for the things of heavenly life. This arises, or rather is created by the Lord, as the fulfillment of all that has gone before, all the other stages of our development from general enlightenment to the specific growth of knowledge and understanding represented in the other 5 days of creation. At last, we are not just learning, we are not just growing like grass and trees or soaring intellectually like birds, or diving like fish into the depths of knowledge; we are free! We are living according to what we love, and what we love has now advanced to a relatively selfless, heavenly state.

As for Jacob, he has now returned to Canaan, which represents that heavenly state, and in this struggle that he experiences on his way to meet Esau he is transformed so that he can approach his brother in humility and be re-united with him. Symbolically, he is at the sixth day. Even the change of his name to Israel represents that new state of the will, as it means Prince of God, or Ruling with God, that is, living, acting according to HIS will.

But what of the final day or state? In the beginning it is the day of rest, all things of creation having been completed. God is said to rest because His work is done, but the real point is that when people come through all their stages of spiritual growth and finally begin a life of full intellectual and emotional co-operation with Him His will is fulfilled. And even though we can never think of God as frustrated or unfulfilled, there is a sort of peace that we can imagine for Him when we finally “get it,” and begin to enjoy the spiritual life that He intends for us.

In the Jacob story this is the day of reconciliation with Esau, who, himself having grown and prospered, now represents what is good in the business of daily life. Note the new will represented in Jacob’s – now Israel’s – life is still a function of the understanding. It grows in the understanding as a conscience that eventually overcomes in temptations and rules and provides peace of mind. But the great climax of the story is when this conscience is fully reconciled with the outward life of the will, that is, the determined actions of the body in the world. When this union occurs then there is complete peace, and when there is peace the kingdom of heaven has come and the creation process is complete.

May the Lord bless His creative work in each one of us, and may each of us respond to it by co-operating with His plan – not being impatient with ourselves or others, not getting angry or frustrated because we struggle with it, but searching His Word and our own hearts that we may be like soft clay in His hands, rejoicing every day in what He can and does make of us.

Amen.

Lessons:        Selections from Exodus 19 & 20  
                    performed by the children of the 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> grade

Isaiah 42:5-9 & 65:17-19  
True Christian Religion #571:1