

# His Bow Abode in Strength

Genesis 49:24

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*“His bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.”*

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As always we need to give some consideration to the context, the part of the passage that leads into the verse we are considering. Chapter 49:3-27 are basically a prophecy that covers in a remarkable manner the entire sweep of Israelite history – past, present, and future. It is, of course, Jacob, making comment on the futures of his sons. But in a larger sense the prophecy reflects the future roles of each of the tribes and may portray the entire scope of God’s working with Israel from the conquest of Canaan to the restoration in Christ’s millennial Kingdom. How marvelous it is that God, in spite of the disobedience, rebellion and willfulness that was coming in the nation, still has a grand and glorious purpose for them that will end up with coming of the Messiah and, ultimately, the establishment of His Millennial Kingdom.

It is significant to remember that these are not comments on the sons of Jacob and their families alone. They are comments on the sons and their entire, coming families. It truly ends up as a commentary on the coming nation of Israel. Now, it is true that God will give a good deal of strength and enablement on the nations and many of the individuals that are a part of those nations to enable Israel to become what God desired them to be and serve the purposes that God had in mind for them along the way.

We also need to comment that what we are considering here is not just intended as a statement on what God (via Jacob’s prophecy here) wished to head them in a good direction and help them to be motivated rightly and to have confidence in their ability to actually DO what they were called to do. That strength which God gives to his “Josephs” is real strength; it is not a boasted valor, a fiction, a thing of which men talk, but which ends in smoke; it is true—divine strength. Why does Joseph stand against temptation? Because God gave him aid.

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“Bow” is a reference to the well-known weapon of war in the context in which it used implies and especially strong one, surely enable to accomplish its’ task in defense/offense in battle. Given how it is used here, we must conclude that Moses is not talking about a literal bow, used to fight military battles. Rather he is speaking of the force and effectiveness of the bow, preserved in its’ state of strength, used by hands and arms that were strengthened in the task of pulling the drawstring especially hard. Depending on the way in which a given bow was made, this could be a particularly difficult thing to do. The more sturdy and tight that bowstring was, the more strength it took to draw and to hold the drawn bow.

What is in view here in “*His bow abode in strength...*” speaks of a particularly “strong” bow that, in particular, took a lot of arm strength to draw. Note that it is “His” bow, speaking of his ability to do what was profitable for the Lord’s plan.

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“Abode” mans to live and to persist in a state of being. Thus, there was or would be nothing that was allowed to strike down or lessen Joseph’s (whom Jacob is speaking concerning at the moment in his prophecy. The reference to “his hands” being made strong” speaks of God enabling to do and accomplish what would take more than “normal” ability and perseverance. The point being that this necessary and useful ability and perseverance, the holding of the drawn bow, was only going to happen because of the enablement of the God of their fathers and of the covenant made with Abraham.

Let’s underscore that this is, quite understandably, the first occurrence of the phrase “God of Jacob” in the OT. It does, however, occur some 23 times overall in the OT. We really cannot imagine that it means anything other than what it means here. It points to God as the God of Jacob, the one who because Israel. This Name for God speaks of the protection God offered is and the enabling that He would perform for Israel (read “Jacob”) over the years and centuries. It is not that God was not or cannot be God for any other single person; but that He was Jacob/Israel’s God in a very special and powerful way. There were many, many Israelites throughout the centuries. But is not called by none of their names. We remember Him as David’s God, Solomon’s God, and so on. But in the Scripture, it is this Name that is one of the few most significant. That was because He wished to be associated in a special way with Jacob and his progeny.

- It was Jacob and his offspring that went down into Egypt and were held captive there.
- It was Jacob’s family to whom God sent Moses as deliverer.
- It was Jacob and his offspring whom God protected by means of the Passover provision there in Egypt during the last of the great judgments that finally broke Pharaoh’s will.
- It was Israel, Jacob’s immediate and generational descendants who, but Moses’ and Aaron’s leadership, whom God protected and lead across the desert to the Promised Land.
- It was to the Israelites, Jacob’s children, to whom God gave the tablets of the Law of Moses.
- It was they whom God provided water, quail, manna, etc. while in the desert during that long journey.

Of course, we could spend a great deal of time thinking our way through all of the things that God did on the behalf of these people, but we have seen enough. “The God of Jacob” speaks of God whom, in His wonderful choice,

sought to enable and protect Israel as they the grow and become a nation whom He can use and bless.

When we see this Name of God used it is speaking of a God Who chose and then followed up on that choice to protect and enable His people. It was His power and protection that did what was needed in Israel's life to keep them alive and functioning as a nation.

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Likewise, you and I, as believers, should, and in fact, MUST depend on Him to enable and protect us in our pursuit of God and His purposes in our Christian lives. There is actually nothing that we can do in the spiritual realm without the power of God. All true strength comes from "*the mighty God of Jacob.*" Notice in what a blessedly familiar way God gives this strength to Joseph - "*The arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.*"

This passage portrays God as being personally involved in the lives of Jacob and his children. God is represented as putting his hands on Joseph's hands, placing his arms on Joseph's arms. Like as a father teaches his children, so the Lord teaches them that fear him. He puts his arms upon them. As one writer said:

*What marvelous condescension! God Almighty, Eternal,  
Omnipotent, stoops from his throne and lays his hand upon the  
child's hand, stretching his arm upon the arm of Joseph, that he  
may be made strong!*

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BTW, this strength was also covenant strength, for it is ascribed to "the mighty God of Jacob." Now, wherever you read of the God of Jacob in the Bible, you should remember the covenant with Jacob. Christians love to think of God's covenant. All the power, all the grace, all the blessings, all the mercies, all the comforts, all the things we have, flow to us from the well-head, through the covenant. Where Jacob and his multiplied generations of offspring were the children of the Old Covenant, You and I, as Christian believers are children of the New Covenant.

But we do want to note that in either case, if there were no covenant, then we should fail indeed; for all grace proceeds from it, as light and heat from the sun. In the Old Covenant, no angels ascend or descend, save upon that ladder which Jacob saw, at the top of which stood a Covenant God. We might finish by agreeing with that old Puritan Author: "*Christian, it may be that the archers have sorely grieved you, and shot at you, and wounded you, but still your bow abides in strength; be sure, then, to ascribe all the glory to Jacob's God*". One must admit that this is an excellent truth to keep in mind as we face the stresses and barriers of our day to day walk with Christ.