

BIBLE CHARACTERS

by

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CHAPTER 10

JACOB

In calling attention to the Life and Character of Jacob, my object is to help young disciples to study the Bible.

One of the greatest mistakes made by people who attempt to study the Word of GOD is that they have no system about it. They take up the Bible, and read a chapter here and a chapter there, and then take a glimpse of a mans life, perhaps the beginning of it, or the middle, or the close, and they are all the time getting into darkness and trouble, and say they do not understand the Word of GOD. Now, one way to read and study the Bible is to take up the life of one of these characters, because if it were not important that we should read the whole life the HOLY GHOST would not have had it recorded. It has been recorded for our profit; and if we take up the Bible and read a part of a mans life, and do not follow it out, we shall not understand it. The way to read the Epistles is to read a whole Epistle at once. If you have only time to read a chapter or two, go to the Psalms or Proverbs. But you cannot understand much about the Book of Ruth, or the Book of Esther, for instance, by reading one chapter. You must read the whole book in order to understand it.

One chapter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians cannot be understood unless you read the whole Epistle. If I write a letter, and the person receiving it takes out the middle of it, and does not read the beginning nor the end, and then complains that he did not understand it, there would be no one to blame but himself. And that is being done constantly with the Word of GOD.

Perhaps there is no character of the whole Bible, unless it is David, that people stumble over more than the character of Jacob; they say that a great many things that Jacob did were wrong, and that GOD sanctioned them. That is a mistake which is being constantly made. If they would take the whole life of Jacob, the beginning and the end, and read it through carefully, they would find how GOD dealt with Jacob, and how He punished him according to his ways. And you will find that Hosea gives us the key to Jacobs character and to his life: The Lord hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him. As you read his life you will find that idea running all through it. GOD will punish Jacob according to his ways, and according to his doings will He recompense him.

Jacob was a man who always had an eye to his own advantage. He always wanted an agreement, so that he might get the best of it. But very often people of this kind do not get on any better than others. We see this in the parable of the laborers sent by the householder into his vineyard: For the kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market place, and said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.

Now when the evening was come, and this man was going to settle with his servants, he gave orders that those hired last should come first, and he gave them each a penny, and to those that went at the ninth hour and sixth hour he gave a penny. And those that he hired first, when they came, only received a penny. Then these began to complain about the good man, and to say bitter things against him. Sometimes when you have been traveling, and when you have hired a cab, and have paid the lawful fare, the driver takes the money, and looks at it and then at you, as if you were treating him very shabbily. And when you speak to him about it, and ask him if you have not paid him the lawful fare, he is obliged to confess that you have. So, when the householder came to pay the men that had been working in the heat of the day, they complained, and he said, Didn't you agree? Those that he hired first made a bargain. They would not go out in the vineyard and work until they had made a bargain. They wanted to know how much they were to get. Now, mark this, wherever you find professed children of GOD, who are all the time making bargains with the Lord, or wanting to, you will find they come out poorest after all. Those other men went to the vineyard. They trusted the good man of the vineyard, and they got on a good deal better than the men who made a bargain. So the good man said, Did you not agree with me? Was it not a bargain? Jacob was one of the men who are always making a bargain. He could trust the Lord as far as he could see Him, and no further. He was one of these earthly-minded saints, who are all the time walking by sight and not by faith. And if you want to get a sharp contrast between two men, take Jacob, and then take his son Joseph. One walked by sight, and the other by faith.

If Jacob had had to go through the trials that Joseph had, he would have complained, and thought his journey had been a very hard one. And yet how much better Joseph got on than Jacob!

I believe that the lives of these men have been recorded for our profit: not that we may, as some people do, hide behind them and say that GOD justified their sin; but that you and I might profit by their mistakes, and not fall into them ourselves.

There was a young minister who took a church in Scotland, and he began to preach about the sins of the present day, and those of the people who came to hear him. The old sexton, came to him and said, Young man, if you expect to hold this people you must be careful about preaching on modern sins. You can preach about the sins of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the old Patriarchs, but don't you preach about the sins of the present day, because the people will not stand it.

Now, I do not want to fall into that error. Do not think I am bringing up the life of Jacob and his failings, that it may ease our consciences and justify ourselves. But I want we should remember that many of us are very much like Jacob.

Where you will find one Joseph now, and one Daniel, and Joshua, you will find five thousand Jacobs. The church is full of Jacobs at the present time; and a great many people seem to think they get on better if they are worldly-minded. They think it is a sign of prosperity if they can only secure the good things of earth, and yet get to Heaven. That is about as high as most people get. They just barely get to Heaven, and that is all. But they want to have a good time down here upon earth, and make the most of this world. I am afraid that Jacob started out with something of that idea, and he had a rough journey - a perilous voyage.

It is a good deal better to be out and out for GOD, and to walk by faith, than it is to walk by sight, and be all the time making bargains with the Lord.

Now, his name means - a deceiver, a supplanter. The beginning of the trouble was perhaps with the father and mother. We are told that Rebekah loved Jacob, and Isaac loved Esau; where there is partiality in any family there is always trouble. Rebekah planned to keep Jacob at home and to get Esau out; she took it out of the hands of the Lord and began to plan herself. And the result was that Jacob, whom she loved, left, and she did not live to see him return. Thus she failed in the very thing she wanted to accomplish.

And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. And he 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 pillow, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed; and behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to Heaven; and behold, the angels of GOD ascending and descending on it.

And behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord 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 thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth; and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and the east, and to the north, and to the south; and in thee and thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 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. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of GOD, and this is the gate to Heaven.

We very often hear that quoted in our meetings. Men come into the church and say, This is the house of GOD, and this is the gate of Heaven; and when people come into the house of GOD they put on a sober appearance, and they act as if there was something very strange about the house of GOD, as if it was the gate of Heaven.

Now, I would not say a word to detract from the holiness of the house of GOD. But let us bear in mind that every place ought to be holy to a man of GOD; that in every place we ought to be true to GOD. We ought to be as true to Him in our place of business as we are in the house of GOD; and when Jacob said, This is the house of GOD, and this is the gate of Heaven, he was under the canopy of high Heaven. That was where GOD met him; and GOD will meet us in the street as

well as in a place of worship. He will meet us at home. People come together, and say that where two or three are met in His name, there will He be in the midst of them. But He is also with us in our closets. We are told in another place to go into our closets and shut the door. Any place where GOD is is holy, and this putting on another air and a sanctimonious look when we come into the house of GOD, and laying it aside when we go out, and falling into sin again, thinking that it is going to be acceptable to GOD if we go to church every Sabbath, is all wrong. Every place ought to be holy to a true child of GOD.

And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city was called Luz at first. 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 fathers house in peace; then shall the Lord be my GOD.

This is Jacobs response to the promise GOD made from the top of that ladder. He said that He would be with him; that He would make his seed like the dust of the earth; that He would never leave him; that He would bless him, and that He would bring him back again, and that He would give him a good title to all that land; that the whole country should be his and belong to his posterity: and Jacob answers, Now, Lord if Thou wilt give me enough to eat, and enough to drink, and enough to wear, so that I come again to my fathers house, then Thou shalt be my GOD. You see he was making a bargain. Instead of being content with that glorious covenant which GOD had just made with him, and entering into that promised land, and taking GOD at His word, and thanking GOD for what He had done, he gets up and puts that if in. If Thou wilt give me enough, and bring me home safe, then Thou shalt be my GOD. He wanted to make a bargain right there with the Lord, the first thing he did after the GOD of all grace had met him and spoken to him such wonderful things, and told him how He would bless him and exalt him to Heaven. Think of this great privilege! Yet he could not see anything beyond this life. He was really world-minded, and could not rise into the high state that GOD wanted him to.

Now, we find that he goes down to Haran, and stays there twenty years. Take note, he had gone away with a lie on his lips, and he goes to his uncles, and begins to make sharp bargains. But any man who has been to Bethel and got his conscience quickened is no match for the world; and Jacob got cheated every time. He worked seven years for his wife, and then he got deceived, and another woman was married to him; and then he has to work seven years longer for the woman he wanted. You see he was paid back in his own coin. He lied to his aged father; and now his uncle is lying to him. He deceived his father; and now he is being deceived: and instead of working seven years for Rachel he worked fourteen, and his wages were changed ten different times. After being there twenty long years, if you will read his life carefully, you will find that he did not make anyone much better, nor had he much influence over his uncle Laban.

After meeting GOD at Bethel and receiving such a promise, he could have afforded to be very generous - he could have afforded to leave himself in GOD's hands and let GOD plan for him; but instead of that he begins to plan for himself, and he was trying to drive sharp bargains with Laban, and he got cheated every time. You do not hear of his having an altar there, or of his giving one-tenth of his goods; but, after he had been there twenty long years, one day the GOD of Abraham appeared to him and said:

I am the GOD of Bethel, where thou anointed the pillar, and where thou vowed a vow unto Me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred.

GOD had not neglected His promise, nor broken His vow. If GOD was as forgetful as you and I are, I do not know what would become of us. Think of all the vows you have made; think of all the promises that you have made before GOD, and broken. Have you never promised GOD that you would love Him and serve Him, and become His child? Have you never promised a dying mother, or a dying child, or some loved friend, at the dying hour, that you would turn your face toward Heaven and live for GOD? - and ten, fifteen or twenty years have passed, and that vow is still unkept: it is a broken vow!

For twenty long years Jacob seemed to have forgotten all about his vow at Bethel, but GOD made him the promise, and it was an unconditional one; and now GOD comes to him and says, I am the GOD of Bethel; I am the GOD that met you at Bethel; arise, and leave this country, and go back to your own home. Now see how Jacob begins to plan. He had now a commission from high Heaven to go. If he had been like Joshua he would have walked right out with his head up; but instead of that he begins to plan how he could escape; and he stole away like a coward. While his uncle was absent, Jacob took his servants and all his cattle and his wives, and fled as if he were guilty of some great crime. His father-in-law, when he heard of it, marshaled his servants together and went after him; but while he was fleeing away GOD interfered, and said to Laban the night before he overtook Jacob, Say nothing to him of it, either good or bad. GOD was going to protect him; GOD was going to keep His word; He had promised to do it, and Laban could not touch him; GOD would not allow him to do so. And they met the next day, and Laban did what the GOD of Abraham told him to do, and they parted friends. After that difficulty had been settled, and Jacob had done right, and what GOD had told him to do, then the angels came out to escort him back, and he said, Is not this GOD's host? But instead of going right back, as GOD told him to do, he began to plan again to meet Esau. You see he is all the time planning, planning, planning. There are a great many Christians of this kind now-a-days. They take themselves out of the hands of the Lord, and are all the time planning for themselves. Jacob then did a very mean, contemptible thing. He took the wife that he did not love very much, and some of his cattle, and sent them on before, thinking if Esau should come out to slay them that he would escape: It was a mean, cowardly act.

But now GOD appears to him. After they had passed over one evening, and the hour was soon coming when he was to meet Esau, who threatened his life, he was alone, and the GOD of Bethel met him again. See what took place: And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. Now mark what it says: There wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. It is thought by many that the Jehovah of the Old Testament is the JESUS of the New.

And when He saw that He prevailed not against him, He touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacobs thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with Him. And He said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me. And He said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And He said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with GOD and with men, and hast prevailed.

Now, when did he have the power? When did he prevail? Why, it was when his thigh was out of joint that he prevailed. Now, a man whose thigh is out of joint cannot wrestle much; he is very

weak, and a little child can throw him down then; and when we have not strength, all we can do is to hold on, and then the blessing will come. And these men who are trying to work by the energy of the flesh, and to wrestle with GOD, and to force a blessing out of His hands, have a false idea of GOD entirely. GOD stands with His arms full of blessings. His hands are outstretched to the sinner, and He says, Here they are; take them. All this fighting is with mans own self. The Scripture says, Strive to enter in at the strait gate. Who are we to strive with? Not with the gate-keeper. The gate-keeper stands with the gate wide open, and he says, Come in, come in. But all the striving is with the flesh; it is with this old carnal nature of ours. When Jacob was weak, then he was strong, and then he prevailed; as a prince he had power with GOD.

And Jacob asked Him, and said, Tell me, I pray Thee, Thy name. And He said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after My name? And He blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen GOD face to face; and my life is preserved.

Now, we might have thought that he would have been altogether different from that hour; and some people tell us that he was; I suppose he was, because the Lord blessed him, and that is a pretty good sign: but I think as you read on through his life, you will find that he had not got complete victory over himself, because the next thing you hear is that he is at Shechem, and he builds an altar there, and he calls it El-elohe-Israel. There are a good many men down at Shechem now who have got altars there; they have got a religion, and will tell you that they would not give it up for all the world: but when a man tells you that he would not give up his religion, you may know that he has not much religion to give up. When a man begins to stand up for my religion, as you very often hear, you may know there is something wrong. That is not what we want. We want them to change their lives, and a religion that does not save men from sin is not worth going across the street after. A religion of that kind is a mere empty form, and worthless. Jacob got to Shechem, and he built an altar there.

GOD said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and make there an altar unto GOD, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother. Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments.

You see, while he was at Shechem he had built an altar, and had got a lot of strange gods, too. Now, from the beginning of creation to the present time you will find that one of the things the GOD of the Bible will never allow is, that any god should be put before Him; and yet here was Jacob, whom GOD had met at Bethel and blessed, now at Shechem, surrounded by a lot of idols. And I think that is the weakness of the church today. When there was no strange god - it says in one place in the Scripture - when there was no strange god with Jacob, GOD made him ride on the high places of the earth; and so I believe the weakness of the church today lies in the fact that we have these strange gods in our midst. We need not go to Japan, or to China, or to India, to find people with idols. I will venture to say we have not got to go a mile to find them. They may not bow down to the gods of Egypt, the gods of iron, stone and wood, that they have made with their own hands; but anything that comes between me and the GOD of Heaven is an idol; anything that disturbs my communion with GOD is an idol. And I will venture to say there is many a professed child of GOD today who makes an idol of the card-table, who makes an idol of novels, of dancing, of the theater, of fashion, of self, of pleasure, of money. There are many who bow down to the golden calf today; and the reason why there is so little power in the church of GOD today is that we have got too many idols.

Now GOD says to Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel. And the first thing he did was to put away his strange gods. He knew he was going to meet GOD in Bethel, and that he could not have his idols before Him; that they had to be put away - that was the first thing; and they dug a grave there under the oak at Shechem, and they brought their idols and put them in, and buried them in that grave. I wish that a great grave were dug, so that we might take every one of our idols and roll them into it. What a blessing it would be! How the fear of GOD would fall upon the people! And men who are living in sin and rejoicing over their sins, and who are not ashamed to confess their sins in the street, or in their places of business, who are not ashamed to own that they are enemies of the gospel of JESUS CHRIST - those very men would begin to tremble. We never see the church putting away its idols and cleansing itself of its sins, but that the world will begin to inquire what they shall do to be saved.

We are living in an age of formalism. In the last days perilous times shall come; for men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers... without natural affection... having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.

Let us be careful that we are not simply empty professors. Let us see that we do not scheme, and build altars, saying, This is my church; this is my religion; this is my doctrine; this is my creed. Let us see that we have CHRIST in the heart; that is the main thing. A man may be very religious, and have no CHRIST. The world is full of religion. Religion is one thing, CHRIST is another. Let us see where we are. How many professed Christians there are who have gone to Shechem; they have moved down there and taken all their family; they have an altar there; and because it is fashionable they go to church on Sunday morning; they like to get into society and have their sons and daughters do the same, and, therefore, they go to church; but many of them are in the same condition that Jacob was at Shechem, with an altar, and at the same time with idols right in their own houses. After he had put away his idols he says: Let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto GOD, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went. And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem. And they journeyed: and the terror of GOD was upon the cities that were round about them; and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob. So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is Bethel, he and all the people that were with him. And he built there an altar, and called the place El-bethel.

Now in the sixteenth verse of that same chapter you will find that he journeyed from Bethel. In the first verse in the chapter GOD says, Arise and go to Bethel, and dwell there. That is plain English that GOD wanted him to stay there, not only to go and tarry for a night, but to dwell there, to live there; but he went from Bethel. He would not stay at Bethel, for he would not obey the voice of GOD. Is not that the condition of the church now-a-days, drifting off to religion of forms, instead of staying at Bethel where GOD dwells? In the same verse it says he journeyed from thence; and Rachel, his beloved wife, died. Affliction came. And I believe one reason why we have so many afflictions and sorrows is because we will not stay at Bethel, where GOD wants us; we will not dwell there.

The next thing you hear is that his sons have gone to Shechem to look after their sheep. And he says to Joseph one day, Go to Shechem, and see how your brothers are getting on. Now, of course, this may be imagination; it may not be true; but I can imagine they had gone to Shechem

because the idols were buried under the oak tree, and they went there to get them back again. You take your sons to Shechem, and you will find it is a good deal easier to take them down there than it is to get them out; it is a good deal easier to lead them into sin than to deliver them from it. So Jacob sent Joseph down to Shechem; and while he was wandering in the field looking after his brethren, not being able to find them, a stranger came along and said he had heard them say they were going to Dothan; and Joseph went to Dothan, and when his brethren saw him coming, they said, Here comes that dreamer; we will cut his dreams short now; he is going to make us, with our parents, worship and bow down to him.

When Joseph came they had murder in their hearts, and they were going to slay him; but Reuben prevailed against them, and they threw him into a pit; but afterwards he was sold to some Ishmaelites, and taken down to Egypt; and they took off his coat of many colors.

Jacob had the same failing that his father and mother had; he loved Joseph and Benjamin better than any of the rest of his sons, and that caused jealousy; and where there is partiality in the family it always makes trouble; it stirs up the old Adam in most of us. They took the coat of many colors and killed a kid and dipped it in its blood, and took it back again to the old man, saying they were afraid something had happened to Joseph; that they had found this coat in the field, and it looked very much like their brothers. The old man took it and looked at it. You can see the gray-haired old man examine it. Forty or fifty years have passed away since he deceived his aged father, and his boys are coming back with a lie upon their lips. They are deceiving him; and in their hypocrisy they rose up to comfort their father when they knew it was a downright lie; that the boy had not been torn to pieces by the wild beasts, and that in all probability he was alive and well in Egypt. But for twenty long years the old man had to carry his great sorrow and burden. I can see him at night, lying upon his bed, and in his sleep he dreams of poor Joseph torn by the wild beasts; he can hear the piercing cries of that loving son. Twenty long years Jacob had to reap. Ah, it takes us much longer to reap than to sow. Jacob told that lie, and we now see him reaping it; we are not told that he confessed it to his father before he died, or even to Esau. And now we find that he is reaping just what he sowed.

And then you will see that when he got to Egypt, if you will turn over to the closing up of his life, he took down there a very strange testimony for that heathen king. I can imagine after he had been in the presence of Pharaoh, and told what a hard journey he had had through life, the king would say, I don't want that kind of religion.

And these earthly-minded Christians, who are trying to drive hard bargains with the world, and making the most out of this life - they do not win many people, nor have such a prosperous journey after all. It is a good deal better to be right with GOD, even if we do not make money quite so fast; it is more profitable to have a clear conscience with GOD, and a mind void of offense, and to be poor in this worlds goods, than to have wealth that has been gathered in the way a great many accumulate their wealth - by working on Sundays, and by defrauding the poor, and grinding the unfortunate. Now, see what Jacob has to say:

And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.

He says, I have had a stormy voyage of it; Surely such testimony will not win the king of Egypt

to the GOD of the Hebrews. How unlike Daniel, who, by taking a firm stand when he first went to Babylon and doing right, living for the GOD of Heaven and with the love of GOD in his soul continually, won that mighty monarch, Nebuchadnezzar, to the GOD of his people; and if Jacob had been true he might have sown good seed all through his pilgrimage; and he might have stood before the monarch of Egypt and told him what a blessed journey he had had; how he had been able to serve the GOD of his fathers, and how the GOD of his fathers blessed him. But he says, Few and evil are my days.

If you want to find out whether a man has really been successful, and has had a glorious Christian life and a beautiful voyage through this world, you want to take his whole life, from the cradle, and follow him to his grave. That is the way to study the Bible; not to pick up a chapter here of one who left home with a lie upon his lips; how GOD met and dealt in grace with him; but you want to see also how GOD dealt in government with him. GOD rides in a chariot of two wheels - grace and government - and the two roll side by side. You will find GOD dealing in grace and government with Jacob. That is the way He deals with all His children. So let us be careful, and see to it that we are sowing good seed. And if we have told a lie let us confess it, and ask GOD to take it away - root it out at once. We cannot afford to be deceitful; we cannot afford to rest in shams and profess to be what we are not. GOD wants honesty. GOD wants truth in the inward parts.

~ end of chapter 10 ~
