

GOD PORTRAYS WOMEN

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

RACHEL

Genesis 28-35

IT MUST HAVE BEEN a very tense moment when Jacob said good-bye to his parents. It was just after family prayers, from which Esau was sulkily absent, when the blessing of the Lord was repeated by Isaac, purposely this time. Then Jacob embraced his mother for the last time. He started down the road with mixed feelings—guilt, loneliness, a sorrow in his heart of his own making—yet a blessing from God pronounced on his head. No equipage attended him like the one that went with Eliezer, Abraham’s servant, when he started down this same road. He went out from a rich father equipped only with a staff. Did Rebekah weep before Jacob’s empty tent as she realized the sad consequences of her own clever scheming? Each sin brings its own punishment. **“Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee”** (Jeremiah 2:19).

Night overtook the subdued Jacob at the end of a twelve-mile walk and, having done the most serious thinking of his life, he looked about for a suitable stone to use for a pillow. But the Lord was pursuing him with goodness and mercy. Though he was verily guilty, he was not forsaken by God.

Up to this time he had accepted his parents’ religious instruction; now he was to come under God’s private tuition. At the introduction to this school his heart quaked and he exclaimed, **“How dreadful is this place!”** (28:17). He was learning for the first time that God is not confined to his ancestors’ place of worship, but is to be met alone at unstated times in unexpected places. He was called on to behold three things, a ladder, the angels, and the Lord.

Jacob was at the foot of the ladder, but though so far from God, he was informed that he was a matter of concern to God, and that he would be ministered to by angel messengers. The New Testament explains the meaning of the ladder. The ladder is Christ. He is the way to Heaven and He came down to earth from Heaven. **“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God”** (I Peter 3:18). See also Hebrews 2:10.

Jesus said, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”** (John 14: 6). The Lord, in speaking to Nathanael on his confession of Christ as the Son of God, says, **“Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man”** (John 1:51).

Christ the Son of God comes down where the guilty Jacobs are, to be Son of Man that He might minister to us from God. What a ladder He is! If you are going to Heaven, you are going by way of the Lord Jesus Christ. The door of Heaven is open, and He stands with outstretched hands crying to those weary and heavy laden over their sins, **“Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest”** (Matthew 11:28).

When the Good Samaritan found the robbed man on the road to Jericho, he poured **“oil and wine”** into his wounds. So when guilty, repentant Jacob came face to face with the Lord, he was comforted as only God can comfort, when He said to him, **“I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and I will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken”** (28:15).

God would have him accept heavenly guidance and permanent communion with Him. With these words ringing in his ears and reiterating in his heart, Jacob started off on his four hundred and fifty mile walk. His feet were lighter now as the song in his heart composed by its Divine Author beat the rhythm of his steps.

At last Jacob came to the community well where Laban’s and his neighbor’s flocks were watered and he inquired for the family. One of the shepherds pointed out, **“There’s Laban’s daughter bringing his flocks.”** Did he see any family resemblance to his good-looking mother, and did a seizure of homesickness grip him? How glad he was to see one of his kin after so eventful a journey. He artlessly suggested that the shepherds water their flocks and get away home so he could visit Rachel alone. He immediately sought to serve her, and removed the stone from the well’s mouth and watered the flock.

Our Lord who came forth from a strange country as a Servant in quest of His Bride, must needs first remove the hindrances that sin had caused before life could be given to us. Jacob claimed relationship and kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept. What advances of love the Lord makes to us to win our souls for Himself **“Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross”** (Hebrews 12:2)!

Laban, remembering the handsome present Eliezer brought, hastened to give Jacob a welcome. Jacob had no presents, for he carried only a staff. It was not long before he declared his love for Rachel, and the greedy Laban, instead of giving a dowry, plotted how much he could demand from Jacob. Jacob was so infatuated with his beautiful lady love he bargained to serve Laban for seven years, **“And they seemed unto him a few days, for the love he had to her”** (29:20).

This happy young lover was a favorite of all the family, even of tender-eyed Leah, Rachel’s older sister. She was not lacking in love for cousin Jacob, and when her scheming father proposed that she marry Jacob on Rachel’s wedding day, Leah willingly agreed. Evidently Rachel felt so secure in her possessiveness of Jacob’s love that she had no suspicions of her father’s and sister’s treachery. Who would like to have been in their home the morning after the wedding? I think there was a loud and bitter cry from the emotional, self-willed Rachel as there was from Esau seven years before.

As that cry rang out, did Jacob crimson with shame as he was made to realize what disappointment and supplanting meant to another at his hands? Did he recall the wearing of Esau's clothes to deceive his father? And now Leah had worn a veil to deceive him! How bitter the pill that has engraved on it, "**With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again**" (Matthew 7:2).

We are made to feel sooner or later the sorrow we have caused others. There is the law of just retribution. "**Whatever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them**" (Matthew 7:12). He had that thrust upon him for which he was not willing to work a day. The wheels of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small.

Jacob, who was hurt to the core, charged Laban with deceit. His father-in-law coldly replied, "**It must not be so done in our country to give the younger before the firstborn**" (29:26). To extract yet more service from Jacob, Laban bargained to give him Rachel also if he would serve another seven years for her. These years were not the glad service of anticipation that the first seven had been.

The whole unhappy situation only produced domestic suspicion, envy, rivalries, and bitterness.

What lonely years they must have been for Jacob! Though he had a large family yet there was no spiritual fellowship. How many Christians today seem to think the end of life is reached if one is well married and has a family! Blessed as this is, it cannot fill the heart, and without communion with God life is void. There did not seem to be one in that vast household in whom Jacob could find spiritual response. We read of no family altar, no fellowship in prayers.

Though we have to suffer the consequences of our own ways, yet the Lord is tender toward each individual. How touching are the words, "**And when the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren**" (29:31). There are compensations in the roughest places.

There are briars besetting every path. Many besides Paul have thorns in the flesh. But His grace is sufficient to change the greatest curse into the biggest blessing. Leah's deprivations cast her upon the Lord and she felt conscious of His concern for her. She said, "**Surely the Lord hath looked upon my affliction . . . because the Lord hath heard that I was hated**" (29:32-33). And though her sorrow was not removed, she found reasons to praise the Lord.

And when Rachel saw that she bare no children; Rachel envied her sister and said unto Jacob, "**Give me children or else I die**" (30:1). And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, "**Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?**"

Proverbs 27:4 says, "**Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?**"

Someone has said, "Wrath is the brief tempest of the mind, anger a passing emotion (distressing, no doubt), but jealousy abides when all evidence of it has disappeared."

It is like a volcano, it may erupt at any time. One can never be fair or just toward another of whom one is jealous. It puts everything out of focus. Jealousy dethrones reason. Envy grieves at the good of another; it is offensive to God and injurious to our neighbor.

Was Rachel so engrossed with her own beauty and Jacob's devotion to her that she considered the Lord and His things much too solemn for her? She could brook no denial. Why should she be deprived of anything she wanted? Perhaps through life she obtained what she desired by throwing a tantrum. In this instance she was childish in her petulance and demands. Rebekah, though childless, was not resentful to Isaac. Jacob reminded Rachel that God is the Author of life—why not go to Him about it? But apparently Rachel was deaf to reason and to God.

Our ways in defiance of God only bring us grief. She would not be satisfied with one child, but she must have as many as Leah, she must not be outdone! Was she threatening suicide to play on her husband's feelings, or did she mean that she would grieve herself to death?

Time passed and at last the little rebel decided she would take her husband's advice and speak to the Lord about her grief. **“And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. And she conceived and bare a son: and said, God hath taken away my reproach”** (30:22-23). This child, Joseph, was the most gratifying of all Jacob's children.

Was it because there were searchings of heart on the part of both parents? Did Jacob confess his failure in the spiritual leadership of his own family and was there a godly resolve to train up Joseph for the Lord? He had failed to discipline the older boys and they had behaved very badly. It was time God was recognized in the home.

After the birth of Joseph a terrible fit of homesickness seized Jacob. How sweet a bit of spiritual understanding and fellowship would have been to him then! Perhaps he wanted his mother to see Joseph, the child of the woman he loved, the child that produced holy resolves in his own heart.

Jacob decided to discuss the matter with Laban. He said, **“Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country”** (30:25). Laban realized that he must talk piously and generously if he would retain one who had served him so well. So he said, **“If I have found favor in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake.”**

Jacob said, **“The Lord hath blessed thee since my coming: now when shall I provide for mine own house also?”** (30:30). Laban thought, Where would I find another man so profitable with so little expenditure? Many an ungodly businessman is glad to have a Christian in his employ because he knows his goods are safe under his hands.

Laban said, **“What shall I give thee?”** implying past generosity. Jacob said, **“Thou shalt not give me anything: if thou wilt do this thing for me, I will again feed and keep thy flock . . . All the speckled and spotted cattle, and all the brown cattle among the sheep; and the spotted and speckled among the goats: and of such shall be my hire. So shall my righteousness answer for me in time to come, when it shall come for my hire before thy face”** (30:31-33).

Laban separated the cattle, and gave to his sons all the speckled and spotted goats and brown sheep with orders to take them three days' journey away. Then he gave Jacob all the rest of his flocks.

Jacob had not tended Laban's flocks for twenty years without learning all the tricks of the trade, and the cunning practiced on him made him keener than ever in his sheep-herding. God is aware of evil practices. James 5:4 tells us God hears the cries of those who are cheated by their employers. Laban changed his wages ten times. Jacob **"increased exceedingly and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses"** (30:43).

This made Laban and his sons very envious and their averted and dour faces made things extremely uncomfortable.

"And the Lord said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee" (31:3).

Immediately Jacob sent for Rachel and Leah to meet him in the field. I suppose it was the only place he could talk to them alone. You can almost hear the tears in his voice, **"I see your father's countenance that it is not toward me as before; but the God of my father hath been with me"** (31:5). He pointed out his faithful service, their father's injustice, and God's call to come back to the altar, the place of his vows. They too had felt Laban's injustices to themselves, even selling them and using what rightfully belonged to them for his own business and gain. They said to Jacob, **"Now then, whatsoever God hath said unto thee do"** (31:16).

Isn't it strange that Rachel went right out and stole her father's gods and hid them? Pious words were on her lips while superstition and idolatry lurked in her heart. Was she hiding the gods from Jacob or Laban, or both? Twenty years of association with a God-fearing man had not won Rachel completely from idols.

Jacob, Leah and Rachel packed hard and fast and set the caravan going. It was three whole days before Laban discovered they had departed. And he was mad! His wrath rose as he pursued them for seven days until God spoke to him in a dream: **"Speak not to Jacob good or bad."**

Overtaking Jacob, he accused him of the theft of his gods, which greatly provoked the idol-hating Jacob. The gods were quite impotent to look after their own safety, much less Laban's. Laban confessed that he felt like hurting Jacob but God had interfered.

The accusation of theft hurt Jacob and he gave him leave to search all his stuff, utterly unaware of Rachel's misdemeanor. She, not to be outwitted by her father, pleaded indisposition and sat on his idols. Before all the servants Jacob demanded that Laban set out the stolen goods and then eloquently exonerated himself and told Laban that even then he would send him away empty.

The irrepressible Laban, ignoring all, said, **"These are my daughters, my children, my cattle."** **"Let's make a covenant—promise you won't pass this heap of stones to hurt me."**

He swore by “**the God of Abram, the God of Nahor, the God of their father**” (not Laban’s God). Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. Jacob offered a sacrifice and called his brethren to eat bread. Laban rose up and kissed his children and went to his place as unchanged as ever, though he had one at his table for all those years who in his heart feared God.

Poor Jacob! He was just rid of Laban when a more formidable trial faced him.

He was out of the frying pan into the fire. He had just learned one lesson when the page was turned to face another; such too are our lives. Conscience, like a sleeping dog, wakened and reminded him that he had committed a sin against his brother Esau. Jacob broke out in a panic of fear. *“I’ll send messengers and see if he will welcome me; and if his face is toward me, I’ll tell the servant to say, Thy servant Jacob is rich. I have been with Uncle Laban ever since I left. Will you be glad to see me?”*

The time before the messengers returned was trying, but when they came, it was with anxious faces they hastened to tell Jacob—not that there was a grand welcome awaiting his homecoming after twenty years’ absence—but that Esau was approaching with four hundred men! Doubtless he thought, angry men have good memories. **“Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed”** (32:7).

Sin makes cowards of us all. He thought Esau’s approach foreboded evil. He divided his camp, so that if one part were smitten the other would be left. Then he thought he ought to pray. He called on the Lord, **“the God that said to me.”** Like David in Psalm 119:49, **“Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.”** As Spurgeon says, “Thou wilt not disappoint the hope that Thou Thyself hast created.”

He reminded Him of His promise to bring him back, and in agony he added, **“Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau”** (32: 11). Rising from his knees, he resolved to send a big present to Esau:

- **“The gift blindeth the wise”** (Exodus 23:8);
- **“A man’s gift maketh room for him”** (Proverbs 18:16);
- **“A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle”** (Proverbs 18:19).

Although God had showed Jacob that a host of angels was his escort (32:1), those four hundred men with Esau loomed very large in his eyes. He must protect Rachel and Leah and the children as well as his goods. He sent them across the brook Jabbok. **“And that night Jacob was left alone.”**

God had some things to discuss with his servant that Jacob had dodged for twenty years. He again tried to sidestep the issue, and God had to wrestle with him until he wept and made supplication, as Hosea 12:4 tells us. He had to own to God he was a wretched supplanter (32:27), he had wronged Esau, he didn’t deserve the least of God’s mercies (32:10). When he was thoroughly humbled, having had his thigh put out of joint in his resistance, God could begin to bless.

Until we face the issues with God our character is unchanged; but when we “**behold Him**” we are changed into His image and yielded to Him. The crooked supplanters can be made princely. When old sins are judged before God, He gives us grace to meet and confess to those whom we have injured.

In the morning, his family saw him coming limping badly, and everyone, from little Joseph to big Reuben, inquired what had happened. I think he had prayers that morning and warned one and all against resisting God. Then he prayed fervently about his meeting with Esau.

He arranged his present of five hundred and eighty animals as ostentatiously as possible to make an impression on Esau, and to assure him he was not a pauper coming back to claim a double portion. Then followed in the procession the maids and children, Leah and her children, his beautiful Rachel and favorite son Joseph bringing up the rear. At sight of his twin brother, Esau forgot the past. He saw Jacob bowing seven times, as if owning his superiority.

He ran to meet him, embraced him, fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept mingled tears of joy and contrition. Jacob asked about the family; more tears would flow as Esau told the details of the death of Rebekah. Her death is not recorded. Jacob would never be able to present his wives and children to his mother. Sin bears bitter fruit. When the present was mentioned, Esau magnanimously said, “I don’t need it; I have enough. Keep it.” But Jacob pressed the gift on him as a thanksgiving for Esau’s gracious reception and favor toward him which was all so undeserved. Perhaps there was a lurking desire to “purchase his good will,” and to have an evidence in the acceptance of the gift in case of future difficulty. Esau proposed to start home together, but Jacob excused himself on account of the flocks and children, assuring Esau he would be along later, but he actually determined to go another way.

God had told him to go back to Bethel, to the place where he first met Him and made his vows. But he turned aside and settled thirty miles away near the Hivites. It was a calamitous decision for the whole family, as we shall see when we study Dinah. It is sad when trouble or difficulty have to come into our life before we are willing to fully obey the Lord.

“And 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” (35:1).

Jacob immediately felt the need of moral housecleaning in his own family. **“Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and 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”** (35:2-3).

Have we things surreptitiously retained that are out of keeping with the presence of the Lord?

- Do we indulge in things and pleasures that are embarrassing in the presence of those who walk with God?
- Do we enjoy through the week what would not be countenanced on the Lord’s Day?

- Do my house, my life, my ways, my garments need renovating,
- Do some things need to be buried so that I may be comfortable in the presence of the Lord?

“Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord” (Isaiah 52:11). Bury everything that is between you and full consecration.

Sin must be put away.

They journeyed from Bethel and were only a little way from Bethlehem when Benjamin, Rachel’s second child was born. Before he came, she said, **“Call him son of my sorrow.”** However, Jacob called him **“son of my right hand,”** or the child dear to me, on whom I will lean, knowing the Lord brings hope even in death.

This is the first record in the Bible of death in childbirth.

Jacob’s love for Rachel was constant and he tried to be father and mother to Joseph and Benjamin, and bring them up in the fear of the Lord. He erected a pillar over Rachel’s grave in memory of his sorrow. Years after when blessing Joseph’s boys he pathetically recalled, **“Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath: and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath, the same is Bethlehem”** (48:7).

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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