

Jacob: The Plain Man
Sunday School Lesson 6
Personality and God's Purpose
Genesis 25
7/19/2020

Introduction: Of all of the early patriarchs of Israel, Jacob is probably the most interesting. The Biblical account of his life spans through almost half of the book of Genesis, and it's filled with intriguing stories of betrayal and jealousy, among other things. Yet, the Bible initially describes Jacob as a plain man. This description presents us with quite a conundrum when considering what we tend to think about Jacob. It seems that Jacob was content to stay home. He was not a hunter like his brother, nor was he so openly brash. He was someone who liked to plan things out. Based on what we gather from Scripture, we would also likely consider Jacob as an intelligent person. He was a thinker. This is seen clearly in his ability to make cunning plans. One of those plans was his trading of food for his brother's birthright. He also had to navigate things carefully with his father-in-law Laban. Most believers only look at Jacob for his deception, but his deception was not a result of his personality. It's important to remember that he deceived his father out of obedience to his mother. We must also remember that Abraham tried to deceive multiple times when he said Sarah was his sister, and Isaac also did this same thing. That does not justify the behavior, but it might help us understand that there's much more to Jacob than just looking at him as a deceiver. Ultimately, we need to understand that God chose Jacob to continue the lineage of Abraham. Romans 9 tells us that this was decided before they were even born, as God in His foreknowledge understood that Esau would not regard his birthright. God had a purpose and plan for Jacob. Let's see how the Lord used Jacob's personality to fulfill that plan.

I. JACOB'S PERSONALITY HELPED HIM TO KEEP A STRAIGHTFORWARD MINDSET IN FOLLOWING GOD'S PLAN. (GENESIS 25:26-33, 28:13-22, 37:10-11, 47:7-9; HEBREWS 11:21)

- A. Notice that Jacob's early actions were a result of his understanding that God had chosen him over his brother (Genesis 25:26-33).** There is little doubt that Rebekah communicated to Jacob that God had chosen him over his brother. This was what clearly fueled the actions of Jacob in his dealings with his brother and father. It is my firm belief that Isaac knew that he was to bless Jacob over Esau, but his preference for Esau clouded his judgment in the matter. Ultimately, Isaac did right by upholding his blessing to Jacob after he realized that he had been deceived (Hebrews 11:20). As Jacob saw that his brother was in line to claim what the Lord had promised to him, he took action. He obviously believed what his mother had told him. It was plain to him. He offered to trade some food for the birthright that had been given to Esau. We frown upon this action, but the Bible does not tell us that Jacob erred in doing this. He certainly did not deceive his brother in it. Unfortunately, Jacob did err in the way that he handled the matter with his father, and he paid a price for it by being deceived several times himself. We don't know how God would have ensured the blessing from Isaac was given to Jacob, but certainly there was a better way than the deceitful measure that was taken.
- B. Notice that Jacob saw the hand of the Lord plainly throughout his life (Genesis 28:13-22, 37:10-11, 47:7-9; Hebrews 11:21).** In the same way that God chose Jacob over Esau, God also chose Joseph over his other brothers. Hebrews 11 commends Jacob for having the faith to accept that God had chosen the sons of Joseph to pass his blessings down to. Even Joseph himself did not understand what Jacob was doing when he blessed his sons. When Jacob left his parents' home, the Lord met with him. He recognized that the Lord spoke to him, and he made plain his relationship with the Lord and belief in what He had promised Jacob. Later, when Joseph told his father and brothers the dream that he had seen, Jacob regarded the words of his son. He was a plain man. He considered things for what they were. While he was intelligent, his thinking was plain. It was very much based on cause and effect. This is why he recognized that his life had been hard because of what he had done to his brother. This is why he expected his brother to kill him. Most importantly, this is why he understood keenly that if you follow God, then God will bless you.

II. JACOB'S PERSONALITY HELPED HIM TO DISPLAY THE STEADINESS NEEDED TO PROTECT THE LINEAGE OF ABRAHAM. (GENESIS 25:27-32, 32:24-32, 42:1-4)

- A. Notice that Esau was too volatile to be trusted with the lineage of Abraham (Genesis 25:27-32).** While Esau was a great hunter, he was not a very steady person. After just a day of hunting, Esau was willing to sell his birthright because he thought he would die. Esau married heathen women because he was upset with his parents, and he wanted to make a point. Esau determined to kill Jacob after he received the blessing from Isaac. Simply, he could not be trusted to fulfill the plans that God had for the future of Israel. This is not to say that God could not still use Esau for His purposes if Esau had chosen to submit

himself to the Lord, but the Lord needed someone who was steady to ensure the future of Israel. Jacob lived a very hard life. Some of that was due to his own decisions, but there were other aspects of it that were simply a result of the plan that the Lord had for him. What would Esau have done when the famine hit the land that Jacob and his children had to endure? Surely, Esau would have struggled to handle things with thoughtfulness and plainness.

B. Notice that Jacob showed his steadiness in his wrestling with the Lord (Genesis 32:24-32, 42:1-4).

Jacob wrestling with God is a very unique story in Scripture. There are many believers who struggle to make sense of it. Why did he do it? Why did God allow it? I think one thing that we can clearly see through it is that the wrestling was a test from God. Jacob was in a very vulnerable state. He had just left Laban, and he had heard that his brother was coming to find him. Right before his encounter with the Lord, he had sent his family away. He was afraid, tired, and alone. These are the ingredients that lead to giving up. Esau had given up when he was tired. The Lord wanted to see what Jacob was going to do. We don't know what commentary took place with Jacob during that night, but he understood that this person came from above and had the power to bless him. It was plain to Jacob that he could not let this person leave. Consequently, Jacob refused to let go of the Lord until He had blessed him. The Lord finally touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh. He commended Jacob for prevailing, and He blessed him there. Undoubtedly, Jacob's plain personality helped him to be steadfast. Throughout the many hard times in Jacob's life, he never gave up. He never turned his back on God. There is something very commendable in that.

III. JACOB'S PERSONALITY HELPED TO SHOW HOW GOD CAN USE ANYONE IN THE FIGHT (GENESIS 34; 1 TIMOTHY 1:18).

A. Notice that Jacob's plain personality did not incline him to violence like his brother (Genesis 25:27, 34).

While Jacob had several confrontations in his life, he was by nature a very mild man. He was not inclined unto violence like his brother was. One might look at Jacob and think that he could not endure a fight. As we saw in the last point, we know that he was steady in his struggle with the Lord. Also, as pointed out, Jacob's entire life was a fight. It was not a traditional fight with real violence, but it was most definitely a fight. It's very interesting that Jacob was so mild. When his daughter was defiled in the land, he looked for a peaceful situation. He tried to keep his sons calm. Ultimately, two of his sons could not contain their rage, and they took things into their own hands. This brought a rebuke from Jacob. He did not want any trouble from the people there. Some men look for a fight. Jacob was not one of those men. He was not like David. He was mild-mannered.

B. Notice that we are all engaged in a spiritual warfare, whether we like to fight or not (1 Timothy 1:18).

Jacob's personality helps us to see how God can use even a mild-mannered person in the fight against Satan. We can understand this in our modern combat. We have people of all types of personalities. There are those in our military who spend their times behind a computer. They are mild-mannered, yet they are still important in warfare. As much as God can and will use a person like King David who welcomes a fight, God can also use a Solomon or a Jacob. The most important thing to understand is that we must submit to God and be willing to do whatever He commands. We must be determined in accomplishing His will. That determination can help us to endure whatever conflicts we are presented with in this life. Jacob had many conflicts, and with God's help, he was able to survive them and fulfill the Lord's purpose for him.

IV. THE PLAIN PERSONALITY ALSO HAS SEVERAL CHALLENGES THAT WE MUST BE AWARE OF. (GENESIS 27, 30:1-2)

A. Notice that the plain personality must be careful not to allow the results to justify the actions (Genesis 27).

As noted, Jacob erred when he deceived his father into giving him the blessing that Isaac intended to give to Esau. It's likely that Jacob convinced himself that this was what was necessary to accomplish God's plan. He looked at it from a plain mindset. Jacob felt that he needed to take things into his own hands. The plain person must remember that a favorable outcome is not validation that the right decision was made.

B. Notice that the plain personality must be careful to recognize the supernatural ability of God (Genesis 30:1-2).

Another challenge of the plain personality is a poor recognition of the supernatural. When Rebekah was without child, Isaac went to the Lord for a miracle. When Rachel was without child, Jacob essentially told her that it wasn't his problem! He recognized that God was in control, but he failed to really grasp that God could or would perform a miracle in allowing Rachel to bear children. His idea of God was more in just His basic blessings and provision. He thought more plainly and analytically. Another example of this in Scripture is Thomas. He believed in Christ but struggled with the resurrection.