

JACOB'S STORY: FROM DECEIVER TO PATRIARCH

Genesis 25-46



The purpose of this study is to show God's love, patience, and promise keeping. It demonstrates how God can make a mercurial character such as Jacob into a patriarch, a man who played a leading role in the story of God's chosen people. God not only changed his name but gave him the opportunity to change his ways. It is a story that gives each one of us hope. Not one of us, whatever we have done wrong in our past, is beyond the grace and forgiveness of God.

WEEK ONE: JACOB THE DECEIVER

Genesis 25:19-34 and 27:1-41

Read Genesis 25:19-28 These verses set the context for this story – the birth of twins: Esau, beloved of his father (Isaac), and Jacob, beloved of his mother (Rebekah).

We see similarities between Abraham and his son Isaac: both begged God for a child: Abraham fathered Ishmael as well as Isaac resulting in two nations, (even today, enemies, and two religions, Jewish and Muslim), (*Read Genesis 16, 18:1-15, 21 and additional information sheet*), and Jacob's sons likewise became two nations, the Edomites (Esau), and the Israelites (Jacob).

Genealogies are very important in Jewish history as they affirmed your identity as a Jew, someone entitled to be a partaker of the blessings God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If you could not prove your heritage, then you could not truly be a Jewish citizen and participate in all aspects of Jewish life and culture.

Verses 22 and 23 show that Rebekah had a difficult pregnancy as even in the womb, the babies appeared to fight for dominance, and she ask God why this was so. God gives a very clear, but surprising response: *"The sons in your womb will become two rival nations. One nation will be stronger than the other; the descendants of your older son will serve the descendants of your younger son."* We are told that the first twin, Esau, was very red at birth and extremely hairy, reflected in his name. The other twin was born with his hand grasping his brother's heel. In Hebrew, Jacob means

“one who follows on another’s heels” (v.26). His name came to mean “*supplanter*”, which is often interpreted as someone who seizes, circumvents, or usurps. As we go through the study, we will learn that not only Jacob but also many of his relatives practiced some very questionable behaviour.

- Do we seriously consider the way we behave? Are we always honest and upright in all our dealings? Can people trust us?

We read in [verse 27](#) that as they grew up, Esau became a skilful hunter whilst Jacob was a person who like to stay at home. Isaac loved Esau in particular because of the wild game he brought home, but Rebekah favoured Jacob. And, despite being the second born, his mother, was determined he should take the role of the first.

[Read verses 29-34](#)

Our natural desires, if left unchecked, can lead us to do foolish things. Esau felt hungry to the point of starvation. How many of us as children have run into the house exclaiming that we were starving? Of course, we were far from that having eaten only a couple or three hours ago. Esau had been out hunting all day and would probably be dehydrated, tired, as well as extremely hungry. What point was his birthright if he wasn’t going to survive.

We all know what it’s like to walk into the house when we are hungry to smell something very good cooking. This was what happened on that day. Jacob had cooked a stew and Esau asked for some of it, only to learn it would come at a price. Jacob asked him to sell his birthright. *The birthright (bekorah) has to do with both position and inheritance. By birthright, the firstborn son inherited the leadership of the family and the judicial authority of his father.*

[Read Deuteronomy 21:17](#) A firstborn son was entitled to receive twice the inheritance of that of a father’s other sons, in addition to the right of succession.

- It is impossible to put ourselves in that situation and wonder what we would have done. We don’t have anything comparable in our society, but have we ever entered into an agreement which left us in a poorer state than before?
- There is a sense of carelessness in Esau’s act, a throwing away of something extremely valuable for immediate gratification. Do we see examples of this today? Have we ever been guilty of this?

- Maybe it's the reverse situation: God offers us salvation if we will give our lives over to him and follow Jesus. How many people dismiss this as foolish or pie in the sky instead of considering what they are losing.

Jacob stole another very important gift: their father's blessing. Once given, it could not be given again.

Read Genesis 27:1-40 One deception tends to lead to another, and we now find Rebekah preparing Jacob to deceive his father Isaac, who was on his death bed. She too is careless in her planning. Even when Jacob questioned how he could deceive his father into believing he was Esau, she says in *verse 13* "Let the curse fall on me, dear son, just do what I tell you." So, Jacob carries out all her instructions and Isaac is persuaded that he is indeed blessing Esau.

- It is a dangerous thing to try and play fast and loose with God. Rebekah's response to Jacob shows that she was interested only in her plans for her son, giving no thought as to what the possible consequences of her statement. We should think about what we say and how we act. Galatians 6:7 says **God is not mocked** - that means he will not allow Himself to be ridiculed, nor treated with contempt nor allow His precepts to be scornfully set aside. We need to guard our tongues and think carefully before speaking about what we will do.

As we shall see in our second study, Rebekah had not finished deceiving her husband.



Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. (Deuteronomy 7:9)

Prayer:

Father God, may we always be true and faithful in all that we say and do so that we bring honour to your name.