

# Jacob

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So we're going to talk a little bit about Jacob. Actually, it's going to be the main topic of our character study. Jacob, of course, is the third of the three, what we call, the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The reason there are three of them is because after Jacob, Jacob has 12 boys, and these 12 boys become the founders of huge families that are known as the tribes. And so each of the boys name becomes the name of a tribe. And so that the three before that are known as patriarchs just to make a distinction, because they're in a line, Abraham, son, Isaac, son, Jacob.

Now, Isaac, I'm not going to talk about too much. The book of Genesis doesn't say a lot about him. Now, it does say some very interesting things, I think. But it doesn't say an awful lot about him. What you have is you have a promise that God gave to Abraham. In some, if you read a commentary or two, you might see it referred to as the Abrahamic or Abrahamic promise. And it's basically the promise that his descendants are going to become almost innumerable. And they're going to inherit the land of Canaan, and that eventually through them, all the earth is going to be blessed. And that's, of course, a pointer to Jesus. And that's really the whole point of what is going on with the promise, is to bring Jesus in the world.

Now, one of the things you can do, as I mentioned last week, is you can go through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and so on. And you can look at the beginnings of the covenant, you know, we have the patriarchal age, we have the Mosaic Covenant, the law, Law of Moses, and then you have the New Testament. And of course, their separate. What's the point of these things? Well, all of that, again, begins in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. What you have is you have Abraham receiving this promise. And then he passes it on to Isaac, and then he passes it on to Jacob. And this promise is very important in the minds of these three men. That's very important in God's plan. But in the minds of these three men, this is, you know, the greatest thing for them to be able to receive.

Let's pick up here, and I'm just going to do what I did last week. I'm going to kind of go through with you the key events that I want to focus on in Jacob's life. We're going to go through the key events of Jacob's life that I want to look at. We're not going to look at everything. Jacob, you know, covers quite a number of chapters in his story, and a lot of his story deserves a lot of attention. But what I want to do is give an overview and tie all of the stories of his life together, so that whenever you decide to go back and look at the individual stories in detail, then you, you have something to wrap your head around.

You notice, Jacob, you will notice as we go through, he has the very same inner conflict that Abraham had. Abraham, his whole life, was fighting with the issue, that if he does what God wants him to do, then the promise God has given him will somehow be jeopardized and, you know, not happen. And so Abraham finds himself all throughout all of these events in various ways trying to help God along, and the problem with all of that is he sometimes does it in very sinful ways. And it's important that you don't downplay the depth of the sin of Abraham in favor of looking at the height of Abraham's faith. Because it is the depth of that sin that shows his, what I call faith journey, how God is working in his life, to make him what he needs to be.

Well, the same fear is in Isaac's life. Isaac makes some of the very same mistakes that Abraham makes, although his mistakes aren't quite as severe in some ways. Of course then, that may be just

because we don't have enough information, you see. And so, it's kind of hard to trace the growth of Isaac's faith like this. Jacob, however, has the same problem as Isaac and Abraham. But it begins a little differently, because Jacob wants the promise. He knows what it is. And he wants it. He's not altogether sure he's going to get it.

So now, if you look at chapter 25. Jacob and Esau are twins born to Rebecca, when Isaac is about 60 years old. The twins inside her womb were, as it were, wrestling and fighting, it seemed like to her, and so she asked, "What's up?" And God tells her that these two are going to come out as two nations. And the younger, the older will serve the younger. Now that's backwards from the way it's supposed to be. In ancient Near East, the eldest is the person. Everyone else is kind of low in the pecking order. And so right off the bat, you have a setup here for a fight between these two kids.

Now, Jacob gets an interesting name because Esau is born, Jacob comes out of the womb, immediately latches his hand on Esau's heel. And so it's kind of like giving them the idea that, hey, this kid is, you know, he's going to try and fight for things. So they give him a name, Jacob. And what it means is "a supplanter." In other words, someone who takes someone else's place, someone who tries to get what isn't his. That's what his name actually means. You might even say, his name means "thief." How'd you like to have a name like that?

So here is Jacob with his name. And now it begins very quickly in chapter 25, verses 27 and 28. What you'll notice is that Rebecca, the mother, prefers Jacob. Isaac, the father, prefers Esau. Esau is a hunter, "a man's man," you might even say. And so Isaac likes him. Jacob is more mild, more cool, more calm and a kind of at home guy. And so his mother likes him a whole lot better.

Well, the first thing you really start noticing is Esau goes out on a hunting trip. And the trip is apparently long and totally unsuccessful. He comes back famished, he's apparently low on water, and certainly low on food. Hadn't eaten in quite a while. And he sees, you know, Jacob there, cooking up a vegetable stew. And he basically says, "Give me the stew." And Jacob: "Ah, opportunity here."

And you know the story, Jacob says, "Yeah, I'll give you the food, if you sell me your birthright." Does anybody know what that birthright is? Well, it's a double blessing. Exactly. What it means is, if there's two kids as there are in this case, when Dad dies, their inheritance is divided into three parts. The oldest kid gets two parts, the youngest kid gets one part. Now it's the same no matter how many kids there are. However many there are, it's divided into one more part. And the firstborn gets two of those parts and everybody else gets just one. And so that's what this birthright is.

Now, Esau basically says, "Hey, what good is it if I'm dead?" And he says, "Okay, it's yours." Now, we could talk a long time about his attitude toward that. The Bible says in doing this, he despised his birthright. But it's Jacob, who I want us to notice. Jacob is not at all averse to extorting even his own brother, his own twin brother. He's not averse to extorting him to get whatever it is he wants. Does that kind of tell you a little bit about the personality that he's got? The character he is? This is the patriarch, this is the guy, you know, third in line, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. He's not showing out real good here.

The next thing you see is the deception of Isaac. Isaac is getting old by this time. And there's some years going by between here. We don't know how many years but obviously there's some number of years here. Isaac is going basically completely blind. And I don't know how blind he was. But obviously, he couldn't look at somebody and tell who they were.

And so Isaac says to Esau, "You go out, hunt some meat, come back and prepare it the way I like. And when you do, I'll eat it and then I will give you a blessing. I will give you your blessing." Rebecca

overhears this. Remember, they live in tents. You talk about thin-walled rooms. I mean, they live in tents, so there's not a whole lot of privacy here. So Rebecca hears about this, pulls Jacob aside and she concocts the scheme. Says, "You go out here, you kill the goat. And, you know, a nice tender one, I'll do the preparing." Said, "And you wrap some skins on your arm, because Esau is very hairy and you're not. You wear Esau's clothes so that you smell like Esau. And so, then you'll just go in, and He will give you the blessing instead." And what you'll notice is that Jacob says, "Hey, whoa, here." Says, "I don't like this scheme. Because if he detects that I am deceiving him, he's going to think of me like a deceiver." You think? His objection is practical. His objection is that he might get caught. His objection is not moral.

I want you to think about the dysfunction that is in this family, for it to get to this situation. Can you imagine how bad this family interaction is? It may be perfectly peaceful, they may not, you know, yell, scream, argue and fight. That may not be what they do. But, they surely don't get along with each other, they don't trust each other. You know, there's no love lost in this in this home here. And yet, these are the fathers of the faith.

Now, again, you got to remember, the reason I'm highlighting all this stuff, is that sometimes we have a tendency to look at other Christians' lives, or our own life, and we see the problems. And we kind of think, well, that's, that's totally terrible. Just, you know, push you away, not have anything to do with you. Or in ourselves, you know. God's going to push me away. How can God love me? You know, that kind of thing. I just don't know that too many of our lives, have situations as bad as some of these people's. And yet God uses them and brings them forward into finally becoming what they need to be.

Well, you go on a little bit here. In the conversation with Isaac, Jacob comes in there. And he brings this food. And Isaac says, "Hey, I sent you out hunting, and here you are, you're here. Bang, how'd you do this?" He says, "The Lord brought it to me." So now Jacob is actually even involving God in this deception? How much lower do you think a faithful person can get? I don't know. "I'm going to, I'm going to lie. I'm going to deceive, I going to deceive my own Dad. I'm going to steal from my brother. And I'm going to bring God in as witness." That's pretty, pretty hardhearted.

Well, it goes on then. So Isaac, you know, Isaac accepts the deception. You can tell as you read through it, that Isaac isn't really comfortable with this. He somehow is, you know, sensing, "Well, let me smell you again. Let me give you a kiss," you know, and so on. He's, the voice isn't right, you know. But he's deceived, because, who in the world would want to believe this could happen? And I think that shows the depth of the sin. Is that Isaac. even though he had some warning signs, he just couldn't believe it was going to happen. And so he went ahead with it. Isaac gave Jacob the blessing. Well, immediately, Esau comes in, prepares his catch, and comes in and says, "Hey, here I am." And Isaac is just, the text says he just shakes. I mean, he is just unbelievable. You got to be kidding me. And then he says to Esau, he says, "I gave him your blessing. And he shall be blessed."

What you need to understand about that blessing is, that the blessing is not the way a lot of people think of it. It's not that Isaac has the choice in what kinds of things he says. These blessings are inspired by God for the purpose of passing this promise down through the ages. Now, I'm not saying that's the way it is with every blessing. But with these blessings, that's exactly what it is. You see, one of the things we think of: we think of it like Harry Potter and some of these other witch and, and other movies, where someone says something good or bad about someone over there, and the fact that they have said these words, make it happen. You see? That's what we call a blessing, or

that's what we call a curse, you know, in the world of magic. Well, that's idolatrous. That's absolutely idolatrous. It basically is the idea that you and I can say certain things, or do certain rituals, and then the gods are forced to obey what we have told them to do. That's what pagan magic is.

I mean, and so we however, recognize that we live by grace. God cooperates with us, but not because we can force him. There is no ritual we can say or do that will force God's hand in any way. So these blessings are a revealing of what God is going to do. They don't cause it to happen. Now you can see this in Balaam. When Balaam is asked to curse the nation of Israel, God takes over him and he speaks a blessing. He is literally unable to speak a curse that he wants to.

As we go through this whole story of Jacob, what you're going to see is that God already always intends Jacob to be the one who receives that blessing. Jacob doesn't get it. Jacob wants it. Jacob is afraid it'll go to somebody else. So, Jacob schemes and deceives and lies and cheats in order to get it. He, even though, it's already his, and he just didn't know it.

Well, let's kind of go on here a little bit. Esau finds out of course, and he's, he's livid. He says, "I'm going to kill him." And he means it, "I'm going to kill him." At least Rebecca believes it, that's for sure. And so Rebecca says, "Hey hey, you've got to get out of here. Go back to Ur of the Chaldees." Padan Aram is the name of the area. Says, "Go back over there. You go with my my brother's family, and you stay over there until this calms down and cools down."

Well, Isaac also gives him a blessing on this trip. And so he goes. Think about what he's just done. By leaving, he has given up the first birthright that he had purchased earlier. So he lost that.

So next, Isaac then gives him a blessing in this parting, in is leaving. This is where Isaac gives him specifically, the Abrahamic blessing. See before he said, "You're going to be wealthy. You're going to be fed. You're going to be taken care of. You're going to be fat." And all that kind of stuff. Really good blessings to have. But he didn't mention the Abrahamic blessing. Now that Jacob is leaving, Isaac gives him that Abrahamic blessing. So he's got what he wants. He thinks. Maybe.

Alright, well next you notice, Isaac, then, chapter 28, along about verse 12. You've heard the story of Jacob's Ladder, right? Okay. Well, everybody has. What you got to think about what is going on there. He goes to this place called Bethel. He doesn't know it from any other place. He's just there. He lays down makes a pillow for a stone. How'd you like to live like that? You know. Boy! So a pillow is a stone, he goes to sleep, and he has a vision. Now the vision is of a ladder that goes all the way up into heaven, as it says. I'm thinking, you know, open to the clouds, the sky, whatever. It says angels are descending and ascending this.

And then as the vision goes, then God blesses, tells him, saying, "I'm going to take care of you. I'm going to bring you back here. I'm going to make you wealthy." You know. "You're going to receive this land." God reaffirms to Jacob, the blessing of Abraham, that Isaac had given him. That's the significance of this. But there's a part of that, that sometimes people miss. We look at Jacob's response to this dream, which by all, every way to look at it, it's a great thing for him to have received. Promise of protection, promise of wealth, promise of "you're going to come back here." You know, everything's going to work out fine.

Jacob builds an altar, pours some oil on it in a way of sacrifice. And then he makes a vow with God. He says, "If you bring these things on me, then when I come back, I will give you one tenth of everything that I receive." What do you think of that? That's a bargain, isn't it? He's bartering with God. He still has this old idolatrous idea that he can barter with God. "Okay, God, you give me this, and I'll do this for you." I think that still shows his heart.

Now what we're going to see as you go on little later, Jacob has his name changed. You remember his name is Jacob, that is the stealer, the supplanter. All right. His name has changed to what? Does anybody remember? Israel. Does anybody happen to know the definition of that word? See, our words don't necessarily mean something. Our names are just pretty sounding names. Oh, doesn't that name sound good? Jacob means, what we've already talked about. Israel means, "the one who wrestles with God...and wins." Because what's going to happen is God has always been intending to bless Jacob. But Jacob is fighting God the whole way. He's trying to pull this blessing in, he's trying to say, "Yes, I've got this, I'm doing these things I've got to do in order to get them." He's fighting God the whole time. And finally, God changes His name. When God changes His name, that's the point at which Jacob finally learns the lesson that God's promise is going to come true. Even if I don't have the foggiest idea how it's going to be able to happen. And that's the same battle Isaac fought. And that's the same battle that Abraham fought. And I think to a large extent, it's the same battle that we fight within our own lives.

Jacob goes all the way over to Padan Aram. He finds Laban, which is his mother's brother. And of course, he has family and flocks and herds, although he's not a very rich man. First thing Jacob does is he sees Laban's youngest daughter, Rachel. She apparently is a beautiful girl. And so he immediately falls in love with her and says, "I want to marry her." And Laban says, "Okay, that's fine." Said, "Now you have to work for me for seven years. And at the end of the seven years, I'll give you her hand in marriage." Jacob works absolutely, in a dream, the text says, kind of a thing. The seven years were just as a day, kind of a thing. He's just as happy as he can be. So along comes the wedding.

And the wedding night, Laban substitutes the older sister, Leah, for the younger sister in the honeymoon tent. Now, does that seems strange to you, that he could get away with that? Well, you have to realize that these people probably had almost no association with each other for seven years. The women are wearing all these coverings. You think the Muslims invented this burqa thing that they wear with the veils and all that stuff? No, they didn't invent it. They didn't invent it at all. It's a lot older than Islam is. And so there's that.

Secondly, how many lights are going to be in there. Did Laban pay the power bill? No. It's as dark as dark gets. She's completely covered. And all she has to do is shut up. Because, you know, they probably never even held hands before this. It just wasn't allowed, wasn't done. And so, that's how the deception carried out. And you'll find interesting that Jacob the deceiver is now deceived.

So he gets up the next morning, finds out what's happened, goes talks to Laban, gets right in his face, apparently. And Laban says, "Hey, can't do that, because she's the older sister, and we have to marry her first." Says, "Now we'll wait a week and said, we'll do a wedding with you and Rachel, and then you're going to serve me another seven years," you know, "for her." "Okay," Jacob says, "that's fine." So that's how you ended up with him having these two wives.

Well, as things go, you know, he's got a favorite wife, and he's got an absolutely unfavorite wife. Isn't this a formula for a good household? No. And they're sisters. Talk about jealous. Man! Well, Rachel does not have children. Leah has four of them. Rachel's getting mad. So Rachel has a servant named Bilhah. She brings him to her, brings her to Jacob and says, "Hey, make her your wife, have kids for me of her." And so she has two kids. Well, Leah, she stops having kids, she's had four, but she's not having any more. So she takes her servant, Zilpah, and gives her to Jacob and says, "Now you give me some kids off of her." And so Zilpah has two more. And then finally, Leah begins having

two more. And so in the end, Rachel finally has two, and that's the 12. Now there's also one daughter of Leah, off of Leah. And her name is Dina. And she'll figure later in another story.

So that's how he ends up with this huge family. And don't you know, jealousy in every step of the way. Because, you know, there's a favorite wife, and then her kids are the favorites. And you know how it goes. You'd think Jacob would pick up on it. He grew up in a household where the parents played favorites. But no, he just copies the same process, essentially. So he isn't getting any wiser with some of this.

But finally, after that, Jacob decides he wants to go home. He goes to Laban and now here's the deception again. He says to Laban, he says, "What we'll want to do is I need wages, and I'm willing to work for them. And so what we're going to do is, we're going to take all the goats that are normally black, and all the sheep that are normally white, and the off colored ones of either way, those will be my wages for the next however many years." Turns out to be six years. So Laban said, that's a good deal. Because he's got a good flock, you know. If you got mostly white sheep, and mostly black goats, and you know, they breed true, you know, there's not going to be very many of these off-colored, you know, animals born. And so Laban is thinking, "Oh, yeah, this is good. This is good." He goes through his herd the next day, pulls out all of the off-colored critters and gives them to his sons. Laban gives them to his sons and sends them a three day journey away. So now the flocks that Jacob is taking care of are 100% pure color white for the sheep, pure color black for the goats.

And so Jacob is behind the eight ball. But Jacob doesn't care because Jacob has a plan. Jacob goes and does a really really strange thing to our way of thinking. He goes over to some trees, he pulls off some branches and he pulls some strip of bark off of these branches and it makes the, the branches look like they kind of got different colors, okay, because of that. He lays those branches in front of the place where the sheep and the goats went to breed. He wants them to have off-colored offspring.

Why is he doing this? Any of you ever heard of magic? Exactly. He's doing it because of greed. But the method he's using is idolatrous based magic. If you go and look at various magical texts of various ancient societies, the way he specifically did it is called sympathetic magic. It's the idea that, you know, if he does this, it's going to force the outcome. You remember what I was telling you about the blessings? This comes into play here. Because Jacob is still of a mind, like all idolaters are, that if you say the right things, do the right rituals, then the outcome is assured because the gods, who control all of this, the gods must respond to what you're doing. He essentially is following idolatrous practices here. Who would ever thought of that? From one of the fathers of the faith? So this idolatry is still a part of his his thinking.

And see, remember, he is still not getting it, that God's grace is because God wants to give it. God takes care of him, because it's what God wants to do, not because it's what Jacob has forced Him somehow to do. You can see why the name of Jacob is and the name of Israel is the one who is fighting against God. You see? Because this is what Jacob is doing.

Jacob, then, however, does show a little bit of faith here. Because he makes this deal with Laban that basically gives Laban everything. And so he does have some confidence that he will come out all right, in the end here, you see. But he does it in a wicked way.

So finally, now, you know, Jacob, is essentially also lying to Laban. But see the deal, says, Jacob says, "I'm going to take care of your sheep, and you're going to grow wealthy off of me." And Laban

loves that idea. But Jacob had no intention of making that happen. So even within the bargain, he is making a lie.

Well, it finally comes back where, at the end of so many years, Laban is wise to what is going on, because Jacob is becoming very, very wealthy. And Laban is becoming poorer and poorer and poorer. And so finally, Jacob decides it's time for me to go home. And they, they leave. Now, at this point, you can start seeing him where he is seeing some things.

If someone will read chapter 31, verses one through six. Chapter 31, verses one through six. Now, what you'll see here is, Jacob is now not working on his own ideas. He's got this problem. And now God is solving this problem for him, saying, "Time for you to go." And it's at this point in some other conversations that, particularly a conversation he has with Rachel, where he tells her, "Listen, we're going to have to go." And he says, "Your father has changed the agreement at least 10 times." I don't know if that 10 is, is a literal 10 or if it's just, you know, he's changed the agreement a lot of times. But, the text says that he changed, Laban and changed the agreement 10 times. And every time Jacob comes back and says, "God protected me that I was not hurt."

So what you're beginning to see here is, that over the course of this time, Jacob is finally coming to understand that it is God who is protecting the promise, God who is fulfilling a promise, and that Jacob's own efforts are not doing the work.

So Jacob then comes back and goes to Canaan. He's got a huge family, and he has huge numbers of flocks and herds of all kinds of things. As he crosses into Israel, he makes camp. Esau is coming to meet him. Esau is bringing 400 men with him to meet Jacob. What do you think's on Jacobs mind? That's it. This is going to be a slaughter. Because Jacob's people are a bunch of herdsman. You know, that's all they are, they're a bunch of shepherds is really all they are. And here comes Esau with 400 men. Well, Jacob is very worried and he begins to pray to God about this. But what is so interesting is he prays to God to save him. He doesn't try to work any bargains in the issue. You see?

This is when an angel appears to Jacob and wrestles with Jacob. The text says they wrestle all night, and Jacob will not let him go. Obviously you and I all know that if the Angel at any moment in time wanted that battle to be over, it would be. And so finally comes the morning and he wants the battle to be over. He reaches and touches Jacob's thigh or hip here somewhere and makes him lame. And, but Jacob still isn't letting go. And he says, "I'm not going to let you go until you bless me. And this is when Jacob's name is changed from "the deceiver" to "the one who fights God, and wins."

As you look through here, Jacob's story goes a lot further. And so, you know, but this is the core issue of the growth of his character, and how all those little things that you've read, you know, maybe for many years, how they tie together in the growth of his faith. Can you see how God has been working in your life over the years? Rather similarly? I think so. I think that's the point.

Alright, well, let's kind of take a look a little bit here. Look at the sins I've got those listed down here, the sins of Jacob. He's extorting Esau. He's deceiving Isaac. He involves God in the deception. He attempts to bribe God. He deceives Laban, and includes in here idolatry and faithlessness, because he's really not trying to work in Laban's best interest at all.

But let's kind of look at a couple of thoughts that I think will help us to finish out here. One is the problem of parental favoritism. We've already kind of touched on that. That is a mistake. Now, let me suggest to you, I don't know that it's a sin. Text never says that. But I think it's a very problematic mistake. You know, it's hard for a parent to not have favorites, If the kids are a really different personality. Especially if one kid is going through a rebellious phase, and the other kid is, you know,

we've all seen these kinds of things. So it does take effort to avoid favoritism. And he doesn't even make an effort to do it.

Well, the second thing is: attitudes and behaviors are passed down. You'll see here, I've got you a list of things. These are what happens with Jacob's kids, after he gets back to Israel, and before they go into the Egyptian countryside. Dinah is raped. And the two brothers, Simeon and Levi, born to the same mother, Leah. They go and kill the whole town where the rapist lived. And rob it blind. You think of that as people who are taught about justice? Wow, even Jacob basically tore his heads. Says, "You're going to make my name black in this area. Everybody's going to turn on us and hate us for what you've done." Now, that doesn't happen. But, that's a terrible thing to have.

If you'll notice next, Jacob has to purge the foreign gods from his people, if you go and look at that text. He's got this huge family here. And he has to tell them, "It's time for you to leave your gods at home." What's he been doing all the rest of the time. Wow!

And then, if you look at here, Ruben, that's the oldest. Ruben slept with Jacob's wife, Bilhah. How'd you like your son to do that? You got to be kidding. The morals here are really high, don't you think? I believe not.

Jacob now favors Joseph. Even at the very end Jacob favors Joseph. You remember all that, the coat of many colors and things like that. All right. And you know what goes on there. The brothers, now, the brothers agree to kill him. Now they don't kill him. But that's just an accident. Was actually the hand of God. But they, what kind of brothers have you raised in your family?

What's happening is this: is that these boys were young boys being raised during the time when Jacob was fighting God. You know, doing the deceptions and so on. That's what these boys remember being raised and that's where they got their training. By the time he gets to Israel, these boys are grown, pretty much old enough. And they're now living out the things that they had seen Jacob, not always do, but sort of do. The selfishness, the self focus, you see. So the mistakes we make when we're young, even though God can and intends to work through our lives to improve our lives, sometimes the consequences of those bad decisions in our younger years will carry on.

Then if you'll notice, they lied to Jacob, about the death of Joseph. And they kept that lie going for a long, long time.

And then thirdly, you may or may not remember this: Judah goes to a prostitute named Tamar. And Judah is so bold about it. He's got his friend with him. He decides to go to the, to the prostitute. He comes back and he has to give her, he has to give her a staff and a ring, valuable things for her pay. He goes home and gets money, gives it to his friend who was there with him. Says, "Go find that prostitute and give her the money and get back my stuff." Now, there's a lot of things we can talk about about that. But just think about how brazen and bold Judah is to go to a prostitute with a friend over here, and then tells the friend to go back and pay her. I mean, is that not bold?

And so, the consequences, even though God is working to improve Jacob's faith and does, the consequences of his sins, are still going to follow.

All right. Well, thank you. Appreciate it.