

JACOB

Genesis 25 - 36

STRUCTURE

Key-person: Jacob

Key-locations: Canaan, Haran

Key-repetitions:

- Jacob took advantage of others: traded stew in exchange for Esau's birthright (25:29-34); deceived Isaac in order to receive the blessing promised to Esau (27:1-29); arranged for weak animals to remain with Laban and the strong ones to become his (30:25-43).
- Conflict between: Isaac and Rebekah over their children; Jacob and Esau over the rights of the firstborn; Jacob and Laban; Rachel and Leah; Laban's sons and Jacob; Joseph and his brothers.
- God speaks to Jacob (28:13-15; 31:3; 32:25-30; 35:1, 10-12; 46:2-4).
- Altar/Pillar: altar (26:25; 33:20; 35:1-7); pillar (28:18, 22; 31:13,45, 51-52; 35:14, 20).

Key-attitudes:

- Isaac's preference for Esau and Rebekah's preference for Jacob.
- Selfishness and greed of Jacob.
- Conflict.
- Cowardice of Jacob.
- Jacob's fear: when he fled from Esau, when he fled from

Laban; when Esau was coming to meet him.

- Esau's anger at Jacob.
- Laban and his son's contempt for Jacob.
- Jacob's love for Rachel and his dislike for Leah.

Initial-situation:

The Lord promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore, that through his offspring all nations would be blessed. God said that his promises would be fulfilled through Isaac's descendants. Isaac took Rebekah to be his wife.

Initial-problem:

Rebekah was barren. Isaac prayed, and Rebekah became pregnant with twins who butted heads while still inside her.

Final-situation:

After spending 20 years with his Uncle Laban, Jacob returned to Canaan with: two wives, two concubines and twelve sons. God confirmed that Jacob's name was changed to Israel. He also confirmed that the land he promised to Abraham and Isaac would be given to Jacob and would be passed onto his descendants.

BIBLE STORY

Isaac, Rebekah and Their Twin Sons

Abraham's son, Isaac, was 40 years old when he married Rebekah, sister of Laban. Rebekah became pregnant with twins. The Lord told her, "Two peoples are butting heads while still in your body; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger" (25:19-23).

The first baby was born red; his whole body was like a hairy robe; he was named Esau (Hairy). His twin brother followed, his hand grasping Esau's heel. He was named Jacob (Heel).

Isaac was 60 years old when the twins were born. The boys grew. Esau became an expert hunter while Jacob stayed among the tents. Isaac, who loved wild game, loved Esau; however, Rebekah loved Jacob (25:19-28).

Once Jacob was cooking stew when Esau came in from hunting, starved. Esau asked Jacob, "Give me that red stew! I'm starved!"

Jacob replied, "Make me a trade: my stew for your birthright as firstborn."

Esau said, "I'm about to die; what good is the birthright if I'm dead?" So Esau swore an oath, selling his rights as the firstborn to Jacob. Esau ate, drank, got up and left (25:29-34).

The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants because of my servant Abraham" (26:23-25).

When Isaac was old and nearly blind, he called his older son Esau and said, "I'm old; I don't know when I might die. Now go to the open country to hunt some wild game and prepare the kind of tasty food I love. Bring it to me to eat, then I will bless you before I die" (27:1-4).

Rebekah was eavesdropping as Isaac spoke to Esau. Rebekah counseled her son Jacob, "I overheard your father tell your brother Esau, 'Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may bless you before I die.' Now, my son, go out to our flock and get two of the best young goats. I will prepare them into a meal for your father. Then take it to your father to eat, and he will bless you before he dies."

Jacob got the goats and Rebekah prepared the food. Rebekah took Esau's best clothes and put them on Jacob. She covered Jacob's hands and the smooth part of his neck with goatskins. Then she gave Jacob the prepared food (27:5-17).

Jacob deceived his blind father. Isaac gave to Jacob the blessing, thinking he was giving it to Esau (27:18-29).

Esau made plans to kill Jacob (27:30-41).

Jacob Flees from Esau to Laban

Rebekah told Jacob, "Your brother Esau is plotting to kill you. Now, my son, flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran" (27:42 - 28:5).

Jacob set out for Haran. When night came, he put a stone under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream where he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven. Angels of God were ascending and descending on it. Above it stood the Lord who said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out over all the earth. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

Jacob woke up and thought, "The Lord is in this place, but I didn't know it. This is God's house; this is the Gate of Heaven!"

Jacob took the stone that he had used for his pillow, set it up as a marker and poured oil over it. He called the place Bethel (God's house). Jacob vowed, "I want God to be with me, watch over me on this journey, and give me food and clothes. Then I will return safely to my father's house. If the Lord does these things, he will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a marker will be God's house. And I will give God one-tenth of all that he gives me" (28:10-22).

Jacob with Laban. He Marries and Has Children

Jacob went to stay with his uncle Laban who had two daughters, Leah and Rachel. Jacob loved Rachel and agreed to work 7 years for Laban in exchange for marrying her. But on his wedding night, Laban tricked Jacob and gave him Leah as his wife. Laban gave Leah a maid named Zilpah. A week later, Laban gave Rachel to Jacob in exchange for 7 more years' work. Laban gave Bilhah to Rachel as a maid. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. The two wives were jealous of each other (29:1-31).

Jacob had 12 children while he was staying with Laban. Leah had six sons and one daughter. Rachel's maid Bilhah had two sons; Leah's maid Zilpah had two sons. Then Rachel had a son, named Joseph (29:32-30:24).

Jacob Fleeing from Laban

Laban's sons accused Jacob of gaining wealth at their father's expense. After spending 20 years with Laban, Jacob fled, returning to Canaan with two wives, two concubines, eleven sons, one daughter, large flocks of sheep, servants, camels and donkeys (30:25 - 31:16).

Jacob sent messengers to his brother Esau. The messengers reported Esau was coming with 400 armed men. Jacob was terrified and prayed. Jacob tried to pacify Esau with gifts of large herds of animals. Jacob's family crossed a creek, but Jacob stayed behind. God, in the form of a man, wrestled with Jacob. God touched the socket of Jacob's hip. Thereafter, he limped. God changed Jacob's name to Israel (meaning "he struggles with God") (32:3-31).

Jacob Returns to Canaan

Esau with 400 armed men arrived. Jacob bowed down to him. Esau embraced Jacob, and they wept (33:1 - 34:20).

God told Jacob to return to Bethel. Jacob told his household to get rid of foreign gods. He built an altar to God. At Bethel, God appeared to Jacob, blessed him, and again gave him the name Israel. God promised that nations and kings would come from Israel. God promised to give the land pledged to Abraham and Isaac to Jacob and his descendants. Jacob set up a stone pillar (35:1-15).

After they moved from Bethel, Rachel died giving birth to her son, Benjamin (35:9-20).

Finally, Jacob returned home to his father Isaac near Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac had stayed. Isaac was 180 years old when he died. His sons Esau and Jacob buried him (35:27-29).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What problems did Isaac and Rebekah experience in their relationship?
2. How did Jacob take advantage of other people?
3. What were some of the conflicts that Jacob experienced?
4. What were some of the occasions when Jacob experienced God intervening in his life?
5. How have you experienced God intervening in your life?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. God can choose a person with undesirable characteristics and use divine discipline to turn him into someone useful. In the first phase of his life, Jacob deceitfully took advantage of others. God had promised Jacob blessings as a result of the covenant established with Abraham; however, Jacob used deceit to obtain things God had promised him. Through divine discipline, God changed Jacob's name to Israel, and he changed Jacob's character.

2. God fulfills his promises, even though he appears in no hurry to do so. God told Abraham that he would fulfill his covenant promise through Isaac's descendants (Gn 12:1-3 and 17:19). Isaac waited twenty years before children were born to him. He was forty-years-old when he married (25:20) and he was sixty when Esau and Jacob were born (25:26). God promised Jacob that he would return to the place where he had his dream (28:10-22). Twenty years passed before Jacob returned to the location (35:1-15).
3. Sin finds the sinner. The deceiver will be deceived. Just as Jacob took advantage of Esau (25:29-34; 27:17-29), Laban took advantage of Jacob by giving him Leah as a wife instead of Rachel (29:21-27).
4. The person who is aware of both the extent of his needs and his own weaknesses is in a condition to experience God's power. Jacob knew Esau was coming with 400 men. Jacob feared Esau's violent anger; Jacob knew his own inability to do battle with Esau, and Jacob knew he needed protection. Only then did he voluntarily surrender to God with mind, body and spirit (32:22-29).
5. A person is transformed when he has an experience with God. Jacob's name was changed to Israel, and he was transformed into a different person (32:28). He stopped being the deceiver who cunningly took advantage of others; he became a person dependent on divine guidance. He stopped being the cowardly frightened man; he became one who was able to face the future with confidence. He stopped being the man who cunningly took from his brother; he sought peace by giving Esau presents (33:8-11).