

Highlight Reel: Jacob

Genesis 25-32

Background: Today we are going to talk about Jacob. He is kind of a big deal. I think in order to understand how big of a deal he is, you have to understand his family tree. There is something really interesting about Jacob's position in this family tree. He is the second born!

In Hebrew culture, the birthright is passed down to the firstborn son in a family. The birthright is a double portion of the family inheritance but also the responsibility to care for the mother and any unmarried sisters. However, in this particular family it meant much more than that.

Jacob's grandpa (Abraham) had been given a promise by God that he would be the father of a great nation that numbered more than the stars in the sky. Because of this promise, the birthright of any of Abraham's descendants included being a carrier of this promise of becoming a great nation.

The promise was secured with the birth of Issac (who was actually Abraham's secondborn son...) Then Isaac had twins: Esau and Jacob. The whole twin thing makes this firstborn son thing a real touchy subject. Read Genesis 25:21-26.

Deceiver: Even in birth, Jacob was grasping to be first, but he didn't have to. While he was still in the womb, God promised that the older son would serve the younger son. Read Genesis 25:27-34.

Esau was hardly innocent here either. It clearly says that he showed contempt for his birthright. In other words, he did not respect or value his position if he was willing to trade it for a bowl of stew. The birthright was the legal claim for the family inheritance but there was also the paternal blessing. The blessing was a verbal bestowal of divine favor and promises of leadership, abundance, or spiritual lineage, often accompanied by a prophetic message. Although often intertwined, the two concepts (birthright and blessing) were distinct. This shows that they could sometimes go to different individuals.

Read Genesis 27:1-10. If you continue reading, you see how the plan worked and, with his mother's help, Jacob tricked Isaac into giving him the blessing that was intended for Esau. It's clear who Jacob got his trickster ways from.

So now, Jacob has tricked his way into stealing both Esau's birthright and blessing. He thought he had to scheme and manipulate to fulfill God's promise. Yet we don't have to force what God has already promised.

Because of the way that Jacob had stolen everything from his brother, he ran away, fearing that Esau would kill him. Read Genesis 28:10-17.

Despite Jacob's tendency towards self-promotion, God still met him where he was at and renewed His promise to the family of Abraham. Jacob's story continues with the constant theme of him struggling, striving, tricking, and grasping for what he wants in life: the right wife, the right child, the biggest flock, the largest household...

There is no shortage of strife and division created by this pattern. His wives and servant wives reflect this culture in the way that they treat each other. His children compete for position within his household.

In time, Jacob's manipulative ways cause him to be on the run again, but this time with all of his wives, children, servants, and livestock. In order to return to the land that God promised him, he would have to face his brother Esau. Jacob sends gifts and a note asking that Esau be

friendly to him. The messenger returned to Jacob to inform him that Esau was coming to meet him... with an army of 400 men.

At this point, Jacob is scared. He sends more gifts...goats, sheep, camels, cows, and donkeys. Then he sends his family and everyone else across the river and stays in the camp alone that night

Climax: This is where his story really comes to a climax. Read Genesis 32:22-32. I've heard this story presented as justification for arguing with God and relentlessly telling Him what you want from Him. I've also heard it presented as a warning story about how God will punish you if you question Him. But I think it reveals a lot about Jacob's insecurities. Think about it. Everything he had was promised to him by God. However, Jacob had schemed and tricked his way into getting all of it. Don't you think he had to question whether or not he was actually living under God's promise? Did he have all that he did because he had forced it into being? If so, was God about to allow Esau to take it all back? Was the blessing and birthright he stole valid in the eyes of God? He had to know!

So he wrestled with God all night. He wouldn't let go until he KNEW that God was with him. Wrestling, struggling, striving, clawing his way to the top was a pattern of Jacob's life. It took this moment of wrestling with God for him to finally realize that the only one who could give him the blessing he so desperately needed was God.

As a result of the wrestling match, God blessed Jacob and changed his name to Israel. This new name signifies that he "prevails with God" and embodies his journey from self-reliance to relying on God.

Our striving wears us out but our surrender transforms us. God changed Jacob's name from **Deceiver** to **Striving with God**. The limp that Jacob received from wrestling with God served as a constant reminder throughout his life that: **It is through surrender, not struggle, that God's blessing is given.**

Reflection Questions:

- In Genesis 25:34, it says that "*Esau despised his birthright.*" Today, we may not have birthrights and blessings given to us by our family in the way they were in Biblical times, but there are times in life when we may have a blessing or a promise given to us by God that we take for granted or don't value. Maybe we turn away from a calling God has placed on our life.
 - Is there something in your life promised or given to you by God that you have not valued or have ignored?
 - What steps can be taken to set this right?
- Jacob was given promises by God but decided to manipulate and force those promises to happen instead of waiting on God and His timing. This is very similar to Abraham and Sarah scheming to make God's promise of a son for Abraham to happen. As a result, there were many difficulties and consequences for Abraham and Jacob that could have been avoided had they just waited for God's timing and plan.
 - Are there consequences you are dealing with in life due to trying to do things on your own?
 - What are you striving for on your own that you need to surrender to God?