

Jacob's character by character

Fifth Lesson from Genesis 29-36

Jacob, hero in Genesis: Jacob receives more attention than any other person in the book of Genesis 25-35, 48-50. The complicated story of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel comprises one of the larger sections of Genesis and includes much information relevant to the history of the Jewish people. Let us identify his character by character in order to learn lessons from his life.

The Schemer (Genesis 25:27-34, 27:1-29): Jacob's parents were Isaac and Rebekah and Esau was his twin brother. God spoke to Rebekah before the birth of the twins, saying, "Two nations are in your womb...and the older (Esau) will serve the younger (Jacob)" (Gen. 25:23). As soon as Jacob makes his appearance in Scripture, we find him manipulating his brother Esau into surrendering his birthright. Esau was so hungry that he gave up his birthright, which he did not really care about (25:32). Later, Jacob tricked his father into giving him the blessing of the firstborn, and is thus called 'the supplanter', or 'one who takes the place of another'.

Reflection: As humans, we may have our own ambitions but the Lord has plans and purposes for each of us. Our task is to wait for the Lord to bring about His purposes in His own way and in His own time. God is well able to perform what He has promised—without the aid of human schemes.

The Dreamer (Genesis 28): Driven from his home by Esau's threats, Jacob sets out on the long, dangerous journey from Beersheba to Haran. As he journeys northward, he comes to the hill country of Bethel where, tired and weary, he falls asleep with a stone for his pillow. There, he dreams of a ladder which stretches from heaven to earth with angels ascending and descending upon it. God has often spoken to people through dreams—from Abimelech to Paul—and in Jacob's dream the Lord confirms to him the covenant He made with his grandfather, Abraham. The promise is given that his seed will be "like the dust of the earth". He anoints the pillow of stone and calls the name of the place 'Bethel' (house of God), which previously had been called 'Luz' (a place of separation).

Reflection: Dream is a medium of God's communications. Has God ever spoken to us in dreams? It's encouraging to know that God can always find a secret stairway to our souls. If He can't get to us when we are awake, He will get to us when we are asleep. Day or night makes no difference to Him. "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams." (Acts 2:17)

The Suitor (Genesis 29): The experience that Jacob went through at Bethel was most definitely a turning point in his life, and he proceeds toward the east with confidence and

joy, little knowing, however, that he is soon to reap what he has sown. Jacob meets Rachel and falls deeply in love with her, but her father Laban requires him to serve seven years for her. On the wedding night, Laban tricks Jacob into believing that Rachel is in his tent, while all the time it is Leah, his older daughter. Laban later gives Rachel to Jacob, at the cost of another seven years of service—so Jacob now has two wives. Leah had many children while Rachel had only two—Joseph and Benjamin

Reflection: *Amor Vincit Omnia* (Latin) Love conquers everything. ***Where there is love there is no labor; and if there be labor, that labor is loved.*** (Jane Austen) Love has a way of taking the drudgery out of work, making long and hard service short and easy. How deep is our love for the Lord? Are we truly in love with Him? An age of work will seem as nothing if love, and not merely a sense of duty, burns at the centre of our soul. St. Paul says in 1 Cor 13:7 ***“love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things”***

The Enterpriser (Genesis 30 & 31): After many years in Laban’s service, Jacob longs to return to his own country, but his discipline is not yet complete. He must wait and serve for even longer. Laban entreats Jacob to stay, acknowledging that Jacob’s abilities have contributed to his own prosperity. Jacob continues to serve Laban, claiming just a small wage, but Jacob cleverly outwits his father-in-law and becomes extremely prosperous. Eventually God speaks to Jacob, indicating that he must return to the land of his fathers, and so without notice he leaves Laban’s house. He is soon pursued by his father-in-law, but God intervenes to protect Jacob from Laban’s revenge and a covenant of friendship is set up between them which they call ‘Mizpah’—for he said: “May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are out of each other’s sight”.

Reflection: Like Jacob, we are faced with choices. One for divine purposes and the other for our personal and familial purposes. We must aim to keep all our relationships open, but give God’s call the highest priority. “He said to another man, ‘Follow me.’ But the man replied, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’” (Luke 9:59-60)

The Wrestler (Genesis 32): After 20 years away from the land of Canaan, Jacob is on his way home. There is, however, one thing that he fears—the displeasure of his brother Esau. Sending messengers ahead of him to acquaint Esau with the news of his return, Jacob learns that Esau intends coming out to meet him accompanied by four hundred men. Fear strikes into his heart and he cries out to God. In answer to his prayer, God sends an angel to wrestle with him, and Jacob is finally subdued when the angel dislocates his thigh. God’s intention, however, was not to kill Jacob but to conquer him. Once Jacob is brought to a place of helplessness, his name is changed to Israel—a prince with God—and he becomes a changed man.

Reflection: In order to overcome our self-centeredness, God sometimes has to not only wrestle with us, but cripple us. We need to learn that the key to spiritual power lies not in our strength, but in our weakness. “but the Lord said to me, “My

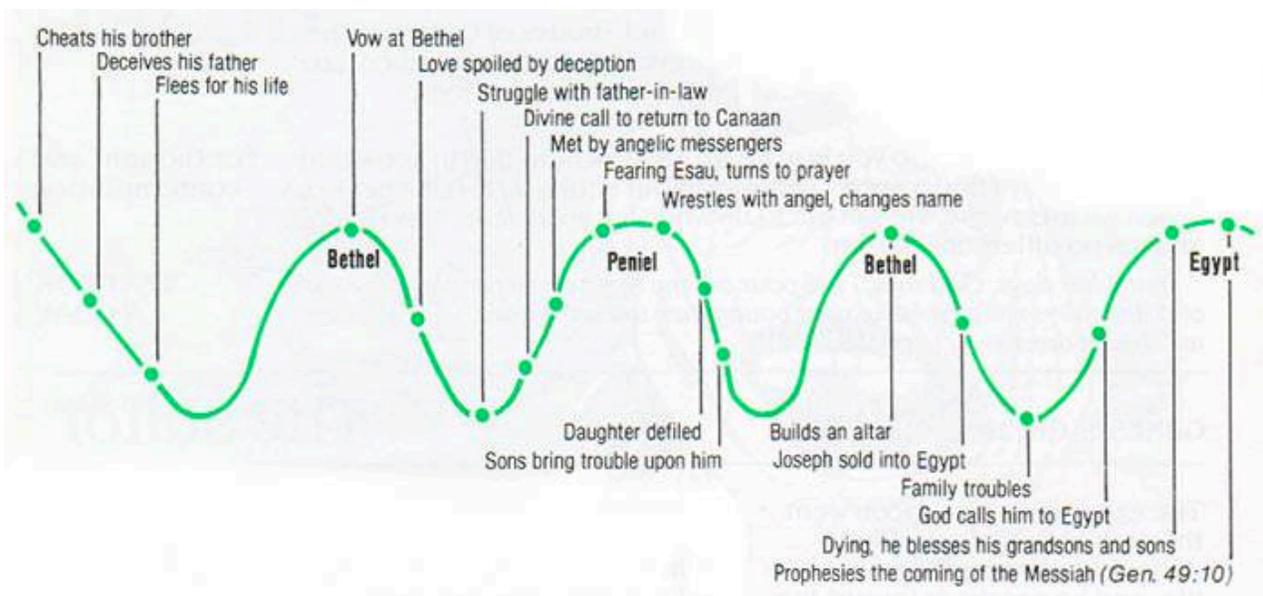
grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong " (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

The Restorer (Genesis 33): After a night of wrestling with the angel, "Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men". Jacob, still somewhat apprehensive, approached his brother and "bowed down to the ground seven times". Jacob had the birthright and therefore, according to custom, was the superior, but this action of humility deeply impressed Esau and they became fully reconciled. Esau offers to escort Jacob to his destination, Canaan, but Jacob declines. Eventually Jacob crosses the Jordan, buys a plot of ground in Shechem and for the first time on the sacred soil of Canaan, erects an altar. At that spot he calls God his God; not the God of Jacob, but the **God of Israel**—his new name.

Reflection: Do we notice this in our life? When something happens to us, something happens to those around us. A changed Jacob resulted in a changed Esau. When we change—others change.

The worshipper (Genesis 35): Once again God speaks to Jacob, this time instructing him to establish his home in Bethel and build there an altar to the Lord. Idols obviously defiled Jacob's house so, before leaving Shechem, he issues the command: "Get rid of the foreign gods" (v. 2). When Jacob eventually arrives at Bethel, he builds an altar, calling it 'El-Bethel', which means 'the God of the house of God' (vv. 6-7). At Bethel, Jacob moves into a more worshipful relationship with God than ever before—but his life is beset with more trials and difficulties than ever before. First, Rachel's nurse dies, and then he suffers the bereavement of Rachel, who dies giving birth to Benjamin. Jacob's twelve sons are all listed in this chapter (vv. 23-26).

The peaks and troughs in Jacob's spiritual life



Lessons from the life of Jacob: Jacob is a man like any of us. His life is a story of a transformed man, who, from a deceiver became a believer. Looking at his early life, it is very easy to hate him for being an opportunist, conspirator, manipulative, and liar. Jacob and Esau are twin brothers. Through deceit and trickery, Jacob acquired not only the birthright of Esau but also his blessing. So what's there to learn from Jacob's life? Obviously, the answer is many. He is mentioned in Hebrews 11 for his strong and unshakeable faith to God. Jacob means supplanter and God changed his name to Israel, meaning, the *prince that prevails with God*. Let us learn few lessons from his life.

1. The examples of parents make a great impact on their children: The story of Jacob shows us how children tend to *repeat* the errors of their parents. We have seen that Jacob's parents, Isaac and Rebekah, had their own favorites. Isaac loved Esau while Rebekah loved Jacob. This fatal error has led to the growing rivalry between Esau and Jacob. Now that Jacob is a father and has his own family, he failed to learn from the life of his parents. He had two wives, Leah and Rachel. However, he loved Rachel more than Leah. Because of this, Rachel and Leah, who are supposed to be sisters, are now in competition for the love of Jacob. When Jacob had children, he favored Joseph more than his other sons. Because of this favoritism, the children of Jacob grew up to hate Joseph. The brothers of Joseph eventually sold him to the Midianite traders (Genesis 37:28). Even after this, Jacob did not learn the lesson and still chose his youngest son Benjamin (Rachel's) as his new favorite child.

For this reason, parents must recognize the importance of their good example. Whether they like it or not, their actions will speak louder than their words. They will serve as an example to their children and the future of these children greatly depends upon the effectiveness of their parents' child-rearing abilities. To become a good example, parents must first develop their own character. The godly character God wants us to build does not come naturally. Parents must constantly seek God's wisdom, will, and purpose to really be a man and woman who are equipped with the right character to guide their children.

2. Don't underestimate the law of cause and effect: Galatians 6:7 tells us, "*Make no mistake: God is not mocked, for a person will reap only what he sows*" This is applicable to everyone and Jacob is no exception. We have seen in the life of Jacob how this law operates. Jacob has planted the bad seed that will later yield a bitter and unpleasant crop. God has already determined that Jacob will rise higher than his elder brother, Esau (Genesis 25:23). However, He did not wait upon the LORD to fulfill this prophecy, but he took it upon himself and dealt deceitfully. He made Esau sell his birthright to him and through a cunning acquisition, he also got Esau's blessings.

As cunning as Jacob was, he met his match in the person of Laban, his mother's brother. For about 20 years, Laban has outwitted Jacob and turned him into a servant. Just like Jacob who used deceit to take advantage of his father Isaac and Esau, Laban also used craftiness and trickery to take advantage of Jacob. Remember that Isaac was "old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see" (Genesis 27:1). For this reason, Rebekah and Jacob were able to steal Esau's blessing. We can see later that Jacob was also "blinded" by

the darkness of his wedding night. Instead of Rachel, whom he loved, Laban gave him his older daughter, Leah, to Jacob. In addition to this, Jacob was also deceived by his own children when they faked the death of their brother, Joseph.

These are just some of the instances that Jacob's earlier actions led to bitter consequences. This should serve as a lesson to all of us. We are also subject to the law of cause and effect. Every action we take, be it good or bad, will eventually yield an effect. The effect would greatly depend on the actions we take. We could see that Jacob later repented and had a converted heart. However, we must also realize that the consequences of our bad decisions would potentially remain in our lives even after we have remorsefully repented and regretted our actions. God can forgive the spiritual effects of our bad decisions, but we may never be able to erase its physical effects. So every time we do something, let us remember this: ***Sow goodness and you will reap goodness. Sow evil, and you will reap evil.***

3: God has a plan for each of us: In Genesis 28:13-15, we have seen how God confirmed the Abrahamic covenant to Jacob. He said: *I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you are lying I will give to you and your descendants. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and through them you will spread to the west and the east, to the north and the south. In you and your descendants all the families of the earth will find blessing. I am with you and will protect you wherever you go, and bring you back to this land. I will never leave you until I have done what I promised you*

The plan of God for Jacob spans for many generations. Today, the promise of God is fulfilled through the modern-day descendants of Jacob. They are the English-speaking nations and the Jewish state known as Israel. No matter who we are, God has a plan for us. This plan has already been laid out even before the foundation of the world. Therefore, it should behoove us to really do our best to be counted worthy to be part of God's Kingdom.

4. We must persevere until the very end: Jacob is the man popularly known as the man who wrestled with God. The Bible said that a "Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day" (Genesis 32:24). We know this Man will later be known as Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ could have easily won the match. However, the point of the whole wrestling match is not about who will win or not, but to test the faith of Jacob. At this point in time, Jacob now recognizes that he can't continue on relying on his own ability and wit to acquire blessings. He knows that it is only God who will be able to give him genuine blessings.

These are some of the lessons we can derive from the life of Jacob. There is no doubt that his life can have many similarities in our modern Christian walk. Though he had lived for thousands of years ago, the lessons from Jacob's life are as valid today as it was during his time. Therefore, we need to realize that God is working with each of us today. He deals with us according to the areas in our lives that we still need to develop. We should have the courage, strength, and faith to persevere until the end!

God's grace in reconciliation between Esau and Jacob (Genesis 33:1-11)

Jacob, a symbol of repentance and contrition: When Jacob saw Esau approaching with a small army, Jacob was both cautious and suspicious about what to expect. Jacob didn't know what was in Esau's heart and Esau didn't know what to expect from Jacob. But quickly it became apparent that both brothers longed for reconciliation – both the offender and the offended. Two brothers met for the first time after 20 years of estrangement. This is a climactic moment! Thankfully, this time, Jacob is not out to defraud his brother. Rather, he takes the low place, *“bowing himself to the ground seven times until he came near his brother”* (33:3). While no words are exchanged at this point, the brothers' actions speak louder than words. Taking the low place is the best attitude we can take in the process of reconciliation. *“Bowing”* here is an act of contrition and repentance. Previously Jacob had taken the high place when he defrauded his older brother out of his birthright, but now Jacob takes the low place before Esau. Previously, Isaac had told Jacob that *“nations would bow down to him”* (27:29), but now Jacob bows down to Esau. He is not used to bowing down to others but he had to bow down to God - first at Bethel and then at the river Jabbok. And now, he bows before Esau as a slave to his master. This is a radically renewed attitude. This is humility, submission. More than that it's contrition and repentance - the lesser bowing before the greater; the servant to his lord. Jacob surely is a changed man. His encounter with God at the Jabbok seems to have changed him spiritually and physically. Now he is a changed man with a new identity – no longer Jacob but Israel (32:28). Accordingly, he takes a new posture before Esau, demonstrating inward renewal in a new attitude. A new attitude is a prerequisite for reconciliation, changing from dominance to subservience, from taking away (his deceit) to giving back (in the gifts).

Esau, a symbol of Forgiveness: It is refreshing to see Esau's change of heart when the two brothers meet again. The bitterness over losing his birthright and blessing seems gone. Instead Esau was content with what he had. Life can bring us some bad situations. We can feel cheated as Esau did but we don't have to remain bitter. We can remove bitterness from our lives by honestly expressing our feelings to God, forgiving those who have wronged us and being content with what we have. Bowing to the ground seven times was the sign of respect given to a king. Jacob was taking every precaution as he met Esau, hoping to dispel any thoughts of revenge. But Esau greeted his brother Jacob with a great hug. We can imagine how that must have been for a man who once had actually plotted his brother's death. But time away from each other allowed the bitter wounds to heal. With the passing of time, each brother was able to see that their relationship was more important than their real estate.

Lessons from this episode: In this meeting between Jacob and Esau we see two dramatically changed men. In Jacob, humility replaces arrogance, submission replaces dominance, and giving replaces taking (as in the birthright and blessing). In Esau, compassion replaces murder, warmth replaces coldness, and acceptance replaces rejection. Wrestling with God at the Jabbok changed Jacob and Esau has changed as well. And by His grace, God can change us too - our character, our attitude, our hearts, and our actions. Jacob's character was changed from a deceiver to a leader. Jacob's attitude was

changed from arrogance to dependence. Jacob’s heart was changed from self-ambition to submission. And Esau’s character was changed from murder to affection. Esau’s attitude was changed from coldness to warmth. Esau’s heart was changed from hardness to softness. This is the Grace of God in action for sinners. We note that just as he desperately sought and received God’s blessing so now he seeks and receives Esau’s blessing. By God’s grace, Jacob sees Esau now, not as a brother to be extorted but a brother who reflects the grace of God: “to see your face is for me like seeing the face of God” (33:10).

How Jacob becomes a type of Christ?

Jacob	Jesus
Jacob is renamed as Israel which means one who prevails with God	Jesus prevails with the Father and works with him for the salvation of his people (John 10:30)
A promise was given to Jacob that he would rule over people and people would serve and bow down to him (Gen 27:29)	Jesus said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me
Jacob had 12 sons who later became the 12 tribes of Israel, the birth of Israel	Jesus had 12 disciples who later became 12 apostles, the birth of the Church
Jacob stole his brother’s birthright by tricking his father and he was stubborn and prone to strife. However God loved and poured His favor upon Jacob before he was born. Throughout the OT, ancient Israel’s relationship with God consisted of love, struggle, and waywardness and reconciliation and God’s people were not perfect and yet He called them His chosen people anyway.	<p>Father, they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me, <i>because you loved me before the foundation of the world</i> (Jn 17:24)</p> <p>And a voice came from the heavens, saying, “<i>This is my beloved Son</i>, with whom I am well pleased (Mt 3:17).</p> <p>While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, “<i>This is my beloved Son</i>, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him (Mt 17:5)</p>
After Jacob stole his Esau’s birthright, his brother wanted to kill him. As a result, Jacob fled his home to live among strangers in a far away land, called Paddan-aram, for twenty years. Before returning to his homeland, he built his family, his wealth and riches (Genesis 28:2-4)	Christ left His heavenly Father’s side to become a man upon this earth. As a result, he lived among a world that didn’t understand. His own people wanted to kill Him (Philippians 2:7). Jesus came from heavenly places to share His wealth and glory of the Kingdom with us.

Jacob has a dream in which he saw many angels going up and down a ladder that stretched between the heavens and the earth.

The ladder represents Jesus who bridges the gap between heaven and this world through his death and resurrection for our sins. Revelation states the ladder will be complete when Jesus returns to His Bride (the Church) (John 1:51; Revelation 21 and 22).

Conclusion: Jacob is a troubling character in the Old Testament. He is conniving and he is spiritual too. He has moments of strong faith as well as of fear. His family is sometimes in disarray, and yet at the end he is the one who sets it straight. The life of Jacob is not perfect. There was a lot of family drama and confusion. But in the end, Jacob changed, becoming a faithful patriarch. His story in many ways parallels and foreshadows Christ's life and points directly to the Savior's lineage. This proves that no matter how we start off in life, God can change us for the better. Just as he changed a trickster into the Father of a great nation. The story of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel is filled with much difficulty, yet God used these people greatly to impact history. Their twelve sons were the leaders of the twelve tribes that became the nation of Israel. Through their family, God blessed the entire world, as Jesus Christ was born from the tribe of Judah and offers salvation to all (John 3:16; Luke 2:10). The outstanding lesson of Jacob's life is that God never fails to discipline those who resist, or who are slow to conform to His purposes. If we do not rise to the level which God purposes for us through gentle entreaties and persuasion, then we will be obliged to rise to it through the firm hand of discipline.