



## **BIBLE STORIES EVERYONE OUGHT TO KNOW**

**Main and Oklahoma Church of Christ ^ Adult Bible Studies ^ Winter-Spring 2010  
February 7, 2010  
Jacob and Esau, Genesis 27-28**

### **Getting Started**

Conflict, deception, and lies permeate the story of Jacob and Esau; yet, God works for good among them and their struggles. In the end, God transforms Jacob, the one who struggles with God and man, into Israel. The hand of God works for good among seemingly imperfect people.

### **What's the story?**

The struggles of Jacob and Esau begin before birth as the brothers wrestle in their mother's womb. A troubled Rebekah asks God why this is happening. God responds that her sons will lead rival nations and the older will serve the younger. Esau is born first, but baby Jacob comes out clinging to his brother's heel. Esau is hairy, reddish, and becomes a hunter, favored by his father Isaac. On the other hand, Jacob spends more time among the tents with his mother. What changes the lives of these boys involves Esau returning from a hunt, exhausted and famished. He begs for stew Jacob prepared, which Jacob offers in trade for Esau's birthright. Esau agrees with an oath.

With Isaac near death and ready to bless his firstborn, he asks Esau to prepare his favorite dish of game so he can confer a blessing. Rebekah, who overhears this, fears Jacob will not get the blessing God promised her second son. She helps Jacob deceive Isaac by having Jacob kill two goats, after which she prepares Isaac's favorite dish to serve Isaac, disguised as Esau. Exploiting Isaac's poor eyesight, Rebekah dresses Jacob in Esau's clothes and covers Jacob with goatskin hair. The scheme works, thanks in part to lies Jacob tells about his identity and the source of the food. Isaac confers the primary and irrevocable blessing on Jacob.

Esau returns and brings his father's requested meal. Isaac asks, "Who are you?" and, "Who was it who just served me wild game?" When Esau responds, "It is me, Esau", Isaac knows the voice of his favorite son. Both are enraged with Jacob. Esau vows to kill Jacob, so Rebekah and Isaac urge Jacob to flee to his uncle Laban's home in Haran and marry into Laban's family. Jacob leaves with only a walking stick and lives in exile from his immediate family for over 20 years. In his flight, God speaks to Jacob using a stairway to heaven. God blesses Jacob and his descendants.

In time, an older, wiser, and prosperous Jacob seeks reconciliation with Esau. Jacob hears that Esau will meet him, but with a large army. Fearing Esau will kill him, Jacob turns to God for help. Jacob sends his family to safety, sends hundreds of livestock to Esau as gifts, and remains in camp where, during the night, he wrestles with a "man from God" until dawn. Jacob secures a blessing from the "man" and receives a new name, Israel, which means "one who struggles with God and man."

Esau approaches Jacob's camp and the once proud Jacob bows low seven times before his brother. The two tearfully reunite and make peace. Esau reluctantly accepts Jacob's gift of livestock, and in another show of humility, Jacob has Esau to lead the way. Jacob finally lets his older brother be first.

### **What does this story say about God?**

Using an incredible set of circumstances and wrongheaded human interactions, God shapes Jacob into the father of His holy nation. The spiritual climax is Jacob's wrestling match with God's man. Consider this God's final exam in shaping His man. Jacob passes the exam.

Jacob's petition for God's help shows he has changed. Jacob tells God, "I am not worthy of faithfulness and unfailing love you have shown me, your servant" (32:10). Jacob has matured from the young and opportunistic man who stole his brother's birthright and deceived his father. Jacob is now God-formed and has a firm, long-term relationship with God.

In spite of human mischief, God uses events and flawed people to His ends. All this was at God's direction. God chose to make the aged and childless Rebekah pregnant with struggling twins, God blessed the younger son, God made Jacob smart, God allowed Jacob and Esau to trade stew for a birthright, God allowed Isaac's deception, and God chose to exile Jacob. God commands life events for His ends.

### **Now, what about our faith?**

What is God up to in your life? He blesses some and not others. He uses questionable human actions for ultimate good. Let God be God. God engages His people, working through their life events for His purposes.

### **Monday: Read Genesis 25:19-34**

1. Why do you think God chose to reveal to Rebekah the reversed roles of her two sons before birth?
2. Did Jacob transgress his brother in the stew-for-birthright trade?
3. It seems that Jacob valued the birthright far more than Esau did. Why?

### **Tuesday: Read Genesis Chapter 27 and Genesis 28:1-9**

1. Can we fault either Isaac or Rebekah for having "favorite sons"?
2. Do you think Rebekah ever revealed to her husband God's promise of the older son serving the younger son? Do you think this special knowledge shaped her actions in deceiving Isaac?

### **Wednesday: Same text as Tuesday**

1. Did Rebekah force Jacob to deceive his father, or were they both equally involved?
2. Was Esau justified in his anger against Jacob?
3. One might argue that Rebekah was justified in taking matters into her own hands. Do you agree? If she had not acted, wouldn't Esau have received Isaac's blessing, voiding God's promise to Rebekah?

### **Thursday: Read Genesis 28:10-22**

1. In Jacob's flight from Esau, his vision of the stairway to heaven and God's promises to him and blessings are significant. How so?
2. Why would God bless this seemingly imperfect man?

### **Friday: Read Genesis Chapters 32 & 33**

1. What do you think prompted Jacob to reach out to his brother?
2. Who wrestled with Jacob and what significance does this part of the story have for him?
3. How is Jacob a changed man? Cite evidence from the text.
4. Is Esau a changed man or is God's grace at work through Jacob? After all, Esau sought to kill his brother.