

TUTORIAL
1.24

God chose Jacob to be the ancestor of the Deliverer

See Tutorial 1.6 notes for overall instructions.

The portions of Scripture referred to in this tutorial are: **Genesis 25:1-11, 19-34, 27:1-29, 41-44, 28:10-16. Genesis 29-35.**

Last time

Isaac, the son first promised to Abraham and Sarah long before, was born. God tested Abraham's faith by telling him to sacrifice Isaac, now a young man. Abraham believed and obeyed God. They set out on their journey eventually arriving at the mountain of Moriah where Isaac was bound and laid on the altar. With the knife about to descend, God called out, stopping Abraham and telling him that a ram had been provided as a sacrifice in Isaac's place.

Isaac's wife and sons

We pick up the thread of the Narrative when Isaac is 40 years old. (Genesis 25:19-20) He has just married a woman named Rebekah. Abraham, unwilling for Isaac to marry a local Canaanite woman, has sent back to his Mesopotamian homeland for a wife to be found among his extended family line.

The Account records Abraham's death and the fact that Isaac became the one to whom God entrusted His Promises for that generation. He was to receive the *blessing* – the special position given by God in those days to the patriarchal ancestor of His chosen people. The line through which the Promised One would come. This special place, originally held by Abraham and now Isaac, included with it assurances of God's special protection and favour. It also came with the right to a double portion of the inheritance and the head place in the family group.

Rebekah was unable to have children but after Isaac pleads with the Lord on her behalf, she becomes pregnant. We're given a few brief but fascinating details related to the pregnancy, which proves to be a difficult one. (Genesis 25:21-23) Concerned, Rebekah asks the Lord what is happening to her. He explains that she is to have twins and that what she's feeling is a prenatal

rehearsal of the conflict that will exist between her two sons in life. They are to be the progenitors of two rival nations.

Once again God's straightforward Narrative of events reveals important underlying truths and offers tantalising clues that draw us on to find out more. Although most of the human players so far have been men, we see the relationship Rebekah has with the Lord. It's also worth noting that God is entirely familiar with her two sons and their futures before they're born. In passing too, we should register the fact that already in the Narrative, God has placed great importance on nations, peoples, language groups and family lines. Clearly He relates to people as individuals, but He also deals with them collectively, as groups.

Jacob and Esau – siblings at odds

Rebekah gave birth to twins, but they were certainly not identical, either physically or in character. (Genesis 25:24-28). Esau, Isaac's favourite, the firstborn - and therefore with the rights to the blessing and inheritance that came with that position – would grow up to be a hairy, rough, impetuous individual, uncomfortable indoors, a hunter. His brother Jacob, is described in the text as having “a quiet temperament, preferring to stay at home.” It also adds that his mother, Rebekah, particularly loved him.

An account is given of an event which would have enormous consequences: for them personally, but also in the wider scope of the Narrative. (Genesis 25:29-34) Esau arrives home one day, no doubt from a hunting trip. Tired and ravenously hungry, he demands some of the stew his brother has cooked. Jacob, seeing an opportunity, gets Esau to swear over his birthright to him in exchange for the food. The text comments that this showed Esau's “contempt for his rights as firstborn”. Certainly the choice to swap his birthright seems silly and impetuous. And we can see that it was foolish in terms of the material inheritance he had jeopardised. But was this more than just a bad choice made in a moment of weakness? Later God's Word would describe him as “immoral” and “godless”. But why? Was this reputation deserved?

As we've noted before, God graciously offers genuine responsibilities to human beings who walk humbly in dependence on Him. But Esau was indifferent to this amazing opportunity. He placed no value on the God-given role of guardian of the Promises as family head. And he was also demonstrating a complete lack of interest in the Promised One for whom God had chosen that family line, and eventual nation, through which He'd come. Like Cain and numerous others not identified in the Narrative, like millions of people today, he was preoccupied with his own felt needs and materialistic interests and was unaware or unwilling to acknowledge his desperate need to see his sin-debt paid for.

Jacob, it turns out, was completely different. We might question his tactics but clearly he hugely valued the firstborn birthrights. As comes out in the next parts of the Narrative, Jacob did recognise his need before God. He humbly approached God on God's terms, sacrificing innocent animals in recognition of the death-separation that his own sin deserved. And, we can safely assume, looking forward with keen anticipation for the arrival of the Promised Deliverer. There is certainly indication later in the Biblical Narrative that God, knowing what these two men would be like, had chosen Jacob for the special position of leading the family line in caretaking the Promises – and so for the enormous privilege of being an ancestor of the Promised Deliverer.

Jacob's journey when he runs away from Esau

Later, Jacob, with Rebekah's complicity, tricks the now aged and blind Isaac into thinking he is Esau. His father gives him the verbal blessing and binding confirmation that he will inherit the firstborn rights. Esau, who as we've noted was indifferent to the spiritual aspects of the position, was furious at the loss of inheritance this represented. The text says that from that time on Esau hated Jacob and decided he would find a way to kill him as soon as their father died. When their mother, Rebekah, hears about his plan she organises for Jacob to escape and stay away until Esau's anger has time to cool off. (Genesis 27:41-44)

Isaac sets out on the journey of many days north and east from Canaan to Haran, the trade city where Abraham and his group had lived for a time on their family migration from Ur, and where his father Terah had died. It was also Rebekah's home area. Jacob has his famous dream while sleeping outside one night on the trip. (Genesis 28:10-16) A staircase reaches from earth to heaven, with God's messengers going up and down. By showing this to Jacob and having the incident recorded in His Narrative, God was giving a powerful illustration or metaphor for what the Deliverer would do. Through the rebellion of Adam – head of the human race – the relationship between God and man, between heaven and earth, as it were, had been severed. The way God had provided for people to approach Him through the sacrifices was always a stopgap measure.

Satan, death and sin still ruled the earth and its inhabitants. This had created an enormous obstacle to the permanent access between God and man He desired. The sacrifices provided a temporary way around but didn't deal with the problem. That's what He would send the Deliverer for - to provide a permanent avenue for free, unrestricted interchange between God and man, between Heaven and earth. God spoke to Jacob in the dream, reaffirming the promises He'd made to his grandfather Abraham and father, Isaac.

Jacob completes his journey to the lands of relatives in northern Mesopotamia where he lived, as it turns out, for some 20 years. During that time he marries

two sisters, Leah and Rachel. He has 11 sons, the last, Benjamin being born after their eventual return to Canaan. During the trip back God gave Jacob a new name, Israel. He settled in Canaan again, and in time the growing family, then later the nation (that did and continues to have such a large part in God's Story) would bear his name.



DISCUSSION POINTS

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1. Clearly Esau and Jacob were very different kinds of people. Make some observations about the whole “nature vs. nurture” debate. (If necessary, do some brief research on what modern psychology says about this issue). Was Esau somehow less responsible for his actions than Jacob because of predilections he was born with? Are you ever tempted to excuse your attitudes and actions because “that’s just who you are”? How would you describe God’s perspective on this issue based on this story and the rest of the narrative so far?
2. As highlighted in the lesson, Jacob’s dream reinforces once again that salvation is all about God making a way for man. Reflect on anything you might have heard in “gospel messages” that seems to paint a different picture than this. Would you agree that often the focus is on what people have to do to receive salvation, or the results in their lives? If so, do you have any thoughts on why this so often ends up as the focus instead of it being on God and his response to our real need?