

Each of the brothers want to be the most important, right from birth, there is a one-up-manship between them. The desire to make a name for yourself is one of the themes in Genesis. Each wants to be first; Esau holds this position but Jacob wants it. This is a story about power and ambition. (Compare Jacob with Abraham in Gen 13 and you will realise what makes Abraham great!)



Did Jacob profit from this deal?

This is the amazing thing in the account. We do not read that Jacob inherits as much as a single sheep from his father. Esau got the lot! Jacob's own wealth (a chunk of which he ends up giving to Esau as a kind of reparation – he has to pay for his mistakes) comes from his own hard work and God's blessing on his life.



Does God only choose good people?

Does being chosen by God justify wrong action?



Know Yourself

In this account, both boys act out of the weakness in their own characters. Esau is impulsive, outspoken, extrovert and short sighted. Jacob is an introvert, uncaring, calculating and a good cook.

Each of us have our own set of characteristics which provide us with strengths and weaknesses, enabling us to do both good and harm. A wise person knows the dangers and the benefits their temperament contains and guards their actions and emotions accordingly. As Jesus pointed out, it is good to know what is inside of you, Mark 7:20-23.



What advice would you give Jacob about the dangers in his temperament?

What advice would you give Esau about the dangers in his temperament?

What advice would you give yourself about the dangers in your temperament?



What lessons can you draw from this story?

Watching my character.

Showing favouritism

Taking advantage of those in need.

Letting a conniving nature run out of control.

Letting my needs control my destiny.

The dangers of prophecy.

Letting short term indulge destroy future inheritance – sin works this way.

Trying to make things happen your way not God's way – next week

The dangers of competition - take you bad place.

The dangers of ambition. I want to be first.

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Jacob - Part 1 - Introduction



The story of Jacob takes up almost as much space in Genesis as that of Abraham, his Grandfather, but it is a very different account. Jacob, at the end of his life, became Israel and it is from him that the 12 (13) tribes originate. We will find surprising things about Jacob and the way that God works in his life.



An Ominous beginning.

Read Genesis 25:19-23

There are three generations of barrenness in Abraham's line. On this occasion, Isaac prays for his wife and she conceives. But everything is not ok.



What is the problem?

What does she do about it?

What kind of expectation of the rest of the story does this give us?



Genesis reflects a male-dominated society, but Rebekah is able to seek God for herself and to receive an answer without any intermediary.

What does this tell us?

What is she told?

This highlights two themes that run through Genesis, the choice of the younger over the older, (Cain & Abel, Ishmael & Isaac, Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph and his brothers) and the theme of divine choice, God is free to choose who He will choose and who He will bless. It is not always who we expect it to be.



Read Romans 9:10-13

So what was God's choice based on?

Does God really hate? Malachi 1 v12-13



In Hebrew, hate is a relative term, not an absolute cf Luke 14:26, Mat 10:37. In Luke, Jesus says you must hate your parents, something which clearly contradicts Luke 18:20. Matthew correctly interprets the Hebrew idiom as meaning that you need to love God more than your parents. So in Hebrew hate does not mean quite the same thing as it does in English; it means to put in second place or to love less.



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Read Genesis 25:24-26

What happens when the twins are born?

Esau means hairy. Jacob means, he who grasps, figuratively; deceiver, supplanter, crooked heart or cheat.

How are Jacob and Esau described physically?

Right from birth, they are contrasts. These contrasts run right through the account. It is almost like, as brothers, they have nothing in common.



Jacob at home.

Jacob's life is recorded into four periods. Each of them happen in a different place At home in Bethsheba, working in Paddan-Aram, Worshipping in Bethel and prophesying in Egypt. The description of Jacob that the Bible gives us is quite different in each of these seasons. Between each period, Jacob has a significant crisis and an encounter with God. In each section of his life, God is working to achieve different things. He is not the same man at the end of the account as he is in the beginning.



What does this tell us about Jacob's spiritual life?

What does this tell us about God?



In Genesis, people change as God works in their lives. No one stays static.

Is this still true today?

How does God work in our lives to change us?

At home, we get two accounts of Jacob and what he is like.



Read Genesis 25:27-28

How is Esau described?

How is Jacob described?

Why the parental favouritism?



Isaac and Rebekah love each other, but there are rifts in the home. Genesis is a book of dysfunctional families! Isaac is not a man of action: it is almost like he sees in Esau what is missing in his own life. Favouritism comes up several times in the Genesis (even with God, Malachi 1:12-13, see above) and it usually ends up with trouble. Jacob himself later repeats Isaac's error by favouring Joseph.



What do you think the result of this favouritism was among the boys?

Do you think this favouritism was a good thing?

Favouritism increased the competition between the brothers. It blinded each parent to their children's faults and caused Isaac to reject the prophecy of the older serving the younger.



Genesis very rarely comments on the actions of its characters. It does not say that favouritism is wrong and will only lead to trouble. (cf James 2:9) instead, it shows us the outcomes and leaves us to draw our own conclusions. The book does not give us the answers, but it does force us to think about the questions and to think morally. Genesis was no place for impartial observers; it forces us to enter the story and assess what we are told. We have to change just as the characters in the narrative have to change.



Is favouritism a good thing?

Are there times when it is acceptable?

Do you show favouritism?

Can it lead us to be misled like it did Isaac?

What kinds of favouritism do you show?

What kind does James outlaw? James 2:1&9.



Read Genesis 25:29-34.

The birthright was a physical thing. Although the evidence is slim, it looks like the oldest brother received a double share of the inheritance.

What happens when Esau comes in from the field?

The records at Nuzi tell us that in Canaanite culture, a birthright could be transferred: *"in one such contract, a brother pays three sheep for part of an inheritance."* Kinder p152



Why did Esau sell it?

Was he really about to die?

Is it ok to take advantage of someone who is in distress?

What do you think Jacob should have done?

- *Evidently, lentil stew tastes really nice!*
- *Evidently, Esau is not as good a hunter as we thought!*
- *Red Esau is undone by red stew!*
- *This story has clear parallels to Cain and Abel.*



Jacob is an opportunist, took advantage of his brothers hunger, he did not care about his well being. What is more, he acted out of greed and self interest, not faith in God. He seems as concerned, with putting one over on his brother than the inheritance itself.



Esau was playing a game: he did not take what he was doing seriously and did not expect it to have any affect when the time came for the inheritance to be given. He knows his father favours him and that he will get the inheritance anyway. As far as Esau was concerned this was a free lunch!

It would appear that Isaac knew nothing of this transaction: it certainly did not effect his actions years later. It appears this was a private deal between the two boys: it is unclear whether it had any legal status. It must be noted that we do not know if the twins knew of the prophecy about the older serving the younger.



What does it tell us about both of them?

Which of them comes out best?

What do they value?

Which of them would you like as a friend/son/husband?



The account is harder on Esau than Jacob, but neither of them show anything good at this stage. Jacob values the birthright more than Esau, but only from bad motives. From a modern perspective, it seems easier to accept Esau's failings than Jacob's, but this is only because we do not have the same understanding of just how important a birthright was. The fact that Jacob got the birthright was not wrong; the older will serve the younger, but the crafty way he got it was.