

# Lessons From Characters In Old Testament

## Jacob & Esau

### Lesson 11

#### INTRO:

- A. The relationship between Jacob and Esau is, no doubt, one of the more intense stories in the Scriptures.
- B. The twins are continually at odds, with Jacob winning out over his older brother time and again.
- C. In reading their story, we might be made to wonder why Jacob is even considered in the 'Hall Of Faith' (**Hebrews 11:20-21**).
- D. Even during the more positive events of his life, such as his vision of the ladder ascending into Heaven, his marriage to Rachel, and his wrestling with the angel of the Lord, all occurred during the time of his constant deceit.
  - 1. Furthermore, when Jacob is being deceitful, Esau is someone who "*comforts himself concerning you by intending to kill you* (Jacob). (**Genesis 27:42**).
- E. We might be asking ourselves the question of what does this biblical account have to teach us?
- F. But one thing we must always keep in mind regarding any event we are studying in the Old Testament is: **God made a promise to bring a Savior through Abraham!** (Genesis 12:1-3)
- G. Outline Of Their Lives:
  - 1. Their birth. Genesis 25:19-28
  - 2. Esau sells his birthright. Genesis 25:29-34
  - 3. Esau marries. Genesis 26:34-35
  - 4. Jacob obtains Isaac's blessing. Genesis 27:1-29
  - 5. Esau's disappointment and enmity. Genesis 27:30-40
  - 6. Jacob flees from Esau. Genesis 27:41-46
  - 7. Isaac sends Jacob to Laban's house to take a wife. Genesis 28:1-9
  - 8. Jacob and the ladder that ascended from earth to heaven. Genesis 28:10-15
  - 9. Jacob shows remorse and makes a vow to God. Genesis 28:16-22
  - 10. Jacob marries Leah and Rachel thus beginning what would end up being 12 sons born to Jacob. Genesis 29:21-30:24
  - 11. Matters between Jacob and his father-in-law Laban. Genesis 30:25-31:55
  - 12. Jacob wrestles with an angel. Genesis 32:24-32
  - 13. Jacob and Esau reconciled. Genesis 33
  - 14. God blesses Jacob at Bethel. Genesis 35:1-15
  - 15. Isaac dies. Genesis 35:27-29
  - 16. Esau's descendants. Genesis 36:1-30

#### I. WHO ARE JACOB AND ESAU?

- A. Jacob and Esau are grandchildren of Abraham, the one with whom God established a covenant and they are the sons of Isaac.
- B. These two brothers occupy an important place in all three of God's promises to Abraham.
- C. The Scriptures show the two twins, born of Rebekah, represent two opposing nations (**Genesis 25:23**).
  - 1. Jacob's descendants become known as the Israelites.
  - 2. Esau's descendants are the Edomites.

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- D. Although Esau is the oldest, God's plan for redemption will come through Jacob's lineage.
1. "The elder will serve the younger." (v. 23)

**II. WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN JACOB AND ESAU?**

- A. Jacob and Esau are complete opposites.
1. Esau is described as red and hairy (**Genesis 25:25**) and became a skillful hunter (v. 27).
    - a. The name "Esau" means "hairy."
    - b. He also was named Edom (v. 30) meaning red, which is why his descendants are called the Edomites.
  2. Jacob is a direct opposite.
    - a. Where Esau is red and hairy, Jacob appears to have been fair with smooth skin.
    - b. When the twins were born Jacob took hold of the heel of Esau, so is given the name Jacob.
      - 1) In Hebrew culture, grasping the heel was a figurative way to express deception.
- B. After losing Isaac's blessing, Esau says, "Isn't he rightly named Jacob (deceiver)" (**Genesis 37:36**).
1. Like Esau, Jacob lives up to the meaning behind his name.
    - a. Jacob is a deceiver and comes across as truly selfish.
- C. The first strife between the brothers occurred when Esau sold his birthright to Jacob.
1. The first-born son was to receive a double portion of the family inheritance.
  2. This double portion was an indication that the oldest male child carried on the family lineage.
  3. The first-born held a position of honor, respect, authority, and (depending on the resources of the family), financial security.
  4. For nothing more than a bowl of red stew, Esau forsakes that which is rightfully his and hands it over to Jacob.
- D. Jacob also steals Esau's blessing from their father Isaac.
1. This blessing, spoken by the father, involved the transfer of leadership in the family to the first-born son.
  2. Isaac who is at this time blind and on his deathbed, wants to give his final blessing to Esau.
  3. However, with the encouragement of Rebekah, Jacob poses as Esau and steals his father's blessing.
  4. Esau responds to this by promising to murder his brother.

**III. WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM JACOB AND ESAU?**

**A. ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES!**

1. When Jacob deceived Isaac to inherit his brother's blessing, the outcome resulted in Jacob having to run away for fear of his life.

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2. From a peaceful man living in tents, he had to flee to go where he'd never been and give up everything he loved.
  3. Whatever he hoped to obtain through Esau's birthright and Isaac's blessing came to naught when he had to leave all his earthly possessions.
    - a. Isaac was a rich man.
  4. All of Jacob's deception brought nothing due to this major turn of events.
- B. WE REAP WHAT WE SOW! (Galatians 6:7)**
1. Jacob's deception came back to haunt him in the form of his uncle Laban who was a greater deceiver than Jacob.
    - a. Laban made Jacob marry Leah instead of Rachel although he had promised.
    - b. Laban, for all practical purposes, stole Jacob's labor by making him work for 14 years instead of the 7 years they had agreed upon.
    - c. Laban also cheated Jacob of his wages by not paying him what he said he would.
      - 1) Jacob's wages were changed 10 times.
  2. A Comparison Of Jacob's Deception vs. Laban's Deception:
    - a. Jacob listens to his mother Rebekah's words to deceive Isaac and obtain the blessing from Esau.
      - 1) Laban deceives Jacob concerning Rachel to obtain twice as much work from him. (Long period of servitude.)
    - b. Jacob sets out to violate custom regarding the order of birth.
      - 1) Laban sets out to violate his contract with Jacob and justifies himself by appealing to local customs. (Genesis 29:36)
    - c. Jacob pretends to be Esau.
      - 1) Laban deceives Jacob by substituting Leah for Rachel.
    - d. Jacob deceives Isaac because he's old and blind.
      - 1) Laban deceives Jacob by taking advantage of his not being able to clearly see because it was evening..

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- f. The heartaches and sorrows Jacob went through are apparent when he said these words to Pharaoh: "*The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.*" (**Genesis 47:9**)

**CONCLUSION:**

- A. Here's what we must remember: Jacob would not have become close to God had he not been on the run and fearing for his life.
1. Jacob had fought with Esau, Laban, and even God Himself.
- B. God apparently recognized Jacob for what he could become - a fighter who would go to any length to protect his people.
- C. Despite all his shortcomings, "*Jacob*" - 'the deceiver' - becomes "*Israel*" - 'wrestles with God'.
1. This was the name used to refer to God's people in the Old Testament - "*the children of Israel*".
- D. As in all Bible accounts, our eyes are not to be fixed on human individuals.
1. We must find and consider God's presence and God's doings.
  2. Despite the rivalry, favoritism, deception, anger, and discord, the account of Jacob and Esau shows a God who continually works within the lives of human beings.
  3. God was present in the lives of these people and God worked redemption, forgiveness, and ultimately, salvation.
  4. These things mentioned may not always be in the forefront of life, but they will always be there.
  5. Therefore, let us realize God makes redemption available in our lives.
  6. As flawed as we might be or as prone to wrong decisions as Jacob was, we can be confident in God's love and God's willingness to redeem us.