

Lesson 19: Isaac's Sons, Jacob & Esau: Two Nations

A. Introduction

Just when you thought the story of Ishmael was over and done with, he returns for a curtain call. Today we look at the children of Isaac and Rebekah. This is not a separate story but a continuation of the chronicles of Ishmael as well as Isaac. This is a look at a dysfunctional home with mother pitted against father, and one son against the other, and yet, as we will see in the midst of all this—God is in control. He is at work accomplishing His will and purposes.

In today's lesson will briefly touch on the most important events in the lives of Abraham's descendants as they are recorded in the last twenty-six chapters of Genesis. Our story begins in Canaan, but it will close with Abraham's descendants living in Egypt.

B. Isaac married Rebekah

READ Genesis 25:19-20 (NLT)

¹⁹ This is the account of the family of Isaac, the son of Abraham.

²⁰ When Isaac was forty years old, he married Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan-aram and the sister of Laban the Aramean.

Rebekah, Isaac's wife, was born in the land where Abraham had lived before the Lord led him to Canaan, which is what is now known as Israel.

Abraham, the patriarch of what will become Israel has one legitimate son, Isaac. This son has married his cousin, Rebekah, who moves from far-away Haran (near the border between Turkey and Iraq), to Canaan.

POINT TO MESOPOTAMIA ON MAP 1.

Rebekah feels isolated in this new land and is shamefully barren. It is shameful because for a woman to be childless in that culture is to be incapable of performing her primary function bearing children. Failure to produce an heir is a major calamity for the family in the ancient Near East.

God had spared Isaac's life; God had promised Abraham that through Isaac would come many descendants, including the Deliverer.

C. Esau and Jacob were born.

READ Genesis 25:21-26 (NLT)

²¹ Isaac pleaded with the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was unable to have children. The LORD answered Isaac's prayer, and Rebekah became pregnant with twins.

²² But the two children struggled with each other in her womb. So she went to ask the LORD about it. "Why is this happening to me?" she asked.

²³ And the LORD told her, "The sons in your womb will become two nations. From the very beginning, the two nations will be rivals. One nation will be stronger than the other; and your older son will serve your younger son."

²⁴ And when the time came to give birth, Rebekah discovered that she did indeed have twins!
²⁵ The first one was very red at birth and covered with thick hair like a fur coat. So they named him Esau.
²⁶ Then the other twin was born with his hand grasping Esau's heel. So they named him Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when the twins were born.

POINT TO JACOB AND ESAU ON THE CHRONOLOGICAL CHART

The story of Jacob and Esau is believed by many scholars to have happened around the late 19th to early 20th century B.C. Abraham is widely believed to have existed around 2000 B.C., and thus many have placed Jacob and Esau around 1850 B.C.

All Scripture relates is that Jacob and Esau began to struggle (**Gen. 25:22**) with each other inside the womb. The NIV uses the word "jostled". Whatever this meant, it was clearly more than just normal fetal movement. Rebekah became concerned about it. Consequently, she "**went to inquire of the Lord**".

Verse 23 provides God's response to Rebekah concerning Jacob and Esau.

²³ And the LORD told her, "The sons in your womb will become two nations. From the very beginning, the two nations will be rivals. One nation will be stronger than the other; and your older son will serve your younger son."

Scripture tells us God knows each individual even before they are conceived. In this instance, God foresaw Jacob would end up being more fit to deliver and transmit "the seed of the woman" to the world than Esau would be. Though they were to be twin brothers, Jacob and Esau would possess very different personalities.

The birth of Jacob and Esau involved a physical struggle between the two newborn baby brothers.

²⁴ And when the time came to give birth, Rebekah discovered that she did indeed have twins!
²⁵ The first one was very red at birth and covered with thick hair like a fur coat. So they named him Esau.
²⁶ Then the other twin was born with his hand grasping Esau's heel. So they named him Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when the twins were born.

The struggle which had begun inside the womb, was carried outside as Jacob and Esau were born. This would foreshadow the struggle which would consume much of their lives. This struggle would also manifest itself in the respective countries of Jacob and Esau; Israel and Edom.

The name of each son was indicative of their characteristics. Esau means "red". Esau apparently was a hairy man, and his hair was red. Jacob means "heel grabber". Some scholars have said this implies "supplanter", "schemer" or "deceiver" of which Jacob surely becomes. Rebekah had already received the prophecy from God that the youngest would rule over the eldest. Scripture does not specify, but it seems logical she would have reported this to Isaac.

As the younger Jacob emerged with a grip on Esau's heel, Rebekah and [Isaac](#) surely would have been reminded of God's prophecy. The struggle between Jacob and Esau had begun, and would eventually divide the family.

D. Papa's boy vs. Mama's boy

Theme: Man is a sinner. He needs God and is helpless to save himself.

READ **Genesis 25:27 (NLT)**

²⁷ As the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter. He was an outdoorsman, but Jacob had a quiet temperament, preferring to stay at home.

Isaac is sixty when the boys are born. Rebekah is in her early to mid-thirties by this time. The boys bring great joy into Isaac's life, especially his firstborn. Esau loves the out-of-doors⁴ like his dad and they would go hunting together. The boy becomes a skilled⁵, renowned hunter, who tracks deer in the wilderness and brings them down with his bow and arrow. Esau is happiest when he is out hunting in the wild (25:27a).

The promises concerning the Deliverer would have ordinarily been passed on to Esau.**1**

Here's what we know of Esau:

- He was Isaac's firstborn child. He was Isaac's favorite because he was a man's man. He loved the outdoors just like his father, Isaac.
- Because he was the firstborn child, he possessed the birthright and which meant that the Deliverer from God would then have been one of Esau's descendants. But Esau was not interested in the promises of God.
- He did not trust in God like Abraham and Isaac did.
- Esau was like Cain. He did not see that he was a sinner. He did not see that he needed to be accepted by God.
- As we read about Esau, we will see that he went his own way and lived only for the things of this world.
- These were more important to him than the things which God wanted to give him and teach him.

E. Jacob was peaceful but also a schemer.

Theme: Man must have faith in order to please God and be saved.

READ **Genesis 25:27 (NLT)**

²⁷ As the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter. He was an outdoorsman, but Jacob had a quiet temperament, preferring to stay at home.

The fundamental difference in the character of Jacob and Esau can be seen in Jacob's description as a "**plain**" man. The NIV calls him a "quiet man". The NASB calls him a "peaceful" man. He stays around the tents (25:27b). He and his mother Rebekah grow close, and she helps him understand something of his destiny. No doubt, she tells him of the prophecy that he will rule over his brother. She implants the idea, reinforces it, and as we'll see, she helps him scheme to fulfill it.

Rebekah favored the reflective and spiritual Jacob. He was a Mama's boy. Between Jacob and Esau, Scripture clearly indicates Jacob was more concerned with the affairs of God than was Esau.

As Jacob tended the flocks and dwelt amongst the tents, he was likely to have learned to cook, as Esau had with venison. Jacob is doing just that in **Genesis 25:29**. Esau runs in "*from the field*", as Jacob is preparing a pot of stew.

A logical assumption is Esau's hunt was unsuccessful, and Scripture says he was "*famished*", or weary. He asked Jacob for a bit of his stew. Jacob agrees, though only in exchange for Esau's birthright. Esau's flippant answer illuminates his mind set.

"Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?"

Details are not given as to Esau's condition, yet, the implication is he was "weary", perhaps faint from hunger. Jacob forces Esau to swear the birthright to him. Scripture casually relates Esau "*ate and drank, and rose and went on his way*".

F. The Desire for Instant Gratification

Esau betrays his own tendency towards instant gratification. "I want it now. I can't wait for the future." In so doing, he bargains away his future options. Jacob, on the other hand, is willing to deny himself in the present to obtain in the future what he values most. Each of us faces temptations -- strong temptations -- to get our gratification now. We want instant pleasure, instant wealth, instead of waiting or saving up for something, we just simply say "charge it." We want instant popularity and go on Facebook or Twitter hoping that people will agree with us and follow us. And sometimes, for all this we trade away our futures. Jacob is an example of a person who can live with delayed gratification.

G. Taking Shrewd Advantage

Jacob's motives aren't pure, of course. Esau accuses him of deceiving (27:36), though Jacob isn't guilty of deception -- this time. Instead, Jacob takes advantage of Esau's weakness. In a weak moment he extracts from his brother a binding promise.

"Swear¹¹ to me first.' So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob." (25:33)

Though Esau sells his birthright on the spur of the moment in a casual setting, it seems to have been considered binding. Neither Esau nor Isaac seem to question that Jacob has indeed obtained the birthright (25:34; 27:35-36).

H. Despising Spiritual Things

"Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright." (25:34)

This incident also says a lot about one's value of spiritual things, if we can consider the birthright in a spiritual as well as legal light. Esau values stew more than the birthright, while Jacob values the birthright more than his own integrity. The narrator notes, "So Esau despised his birthright" (25:34). "Despised" is *bāz* ♦, "to despise, disdain, hold in contempt," with the root meaning, "to accord little worth to something."¹³

The author of Hebrews discusses this incident:

"See that no one ... is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears." (Hebrews 12:15-17)

Indeed, Esau *did* seek his father's blessing with tears:

"When Esau heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, ❖Bless me -- me too, my father!" (27:34)

"❖Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!' Then Esau wept aloud." (27:38)

God is merciful and can forgive us of sin, but there are some doors we forever close for ourselves by our actions, actions that cannot be undone. This is for us a sobering warning, which speaks directly to our character and what we value most.

I. Jacob tricks Isaac into blessing him (27:1-40)

While Jacob's acquisition of the birthright might have been strictly legal, his acquisition of his father's blessing is grossly deceptive and unrighteous on its very face.

Genesis 27:1-40 contains the fascinating but dark story of conspiracy and fraud.

Read it along with me. (Gen. 27:1-40)

Isaac is now about 135 years old, bedridden and nearly blind. Tent walls are thin. Jacob's mother Rebekah overhears Isaac telling Esau to hunt some venison and cook it for him, and then receive the formal father-to-son blessing of the firstborn before Isaac dies.

Rebekah remembers -- though Isaac doesn't seem to -- that this is all wrong. The Lord had told her "the older will serve the younger" (25:23).

Quickly, Rebekah calls her favorite son Jacob. Do what I say, she says. Trick your father into giving you his blessing rather than Esau. She comes up with a scheme to trick the old man:

- Prepare a well-cooked meal of domestic livestock -- he'll never know it wasn't venison.
- Wear Esau's gamy-smelling clothing to make blind Isaac think he is speaking to Esau. (Isaac has apparently lost his eyesight, but not his sense of smell.)
- Put goatskin pieces on your arms and neck to simulate Esau's hairiness. (Can you really fool Isaac with fur? Or was Esau that hairy?)
- Jacob is afraid that if his father discovers the ruse, he will curse him. "Let the curse fall on me," says his mother. "Just do what I say."
- Jacob follows his mother's instructions and thus begins the deception.
- Isaac seems to suspect something and asks Jacob directly: "Are you really my son Esau?" "I am," Jacob says without hesitation.

Later, when Isaac realizes what has happened, he calls this deceit. Note the Hebrew play on words in verse 36.

³⁵ But he said, "Your brother came **deceitfully** and took your blessing."

³⁶ Esau said, "Isn't he rightly named Jacob (*ya'aqōb*)? He has **deceived** (*'āqab*) me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing!" (27:35-36)

"Deceitfully" (NIV, NRSV), "subtilty" (KJV) in verse 35 is *mirm*, "deceit, treachery," from the verb *rām*, "beguile, deceive, mislead."¹⁴ Esau remarks that Jacob (whose name means "supplanter, deceiver") has acted in accordance with his name.

J. Isaac Blesses Jacob (27:27-29)

And so Isaac blesses Jacob with a blessing Isaac had intended for the minutes-older twin Esau. It includes:

- Heaven's dew and earth's richness -- an abundance of grain and new wine.
- The subjection of whole nations.
- Priority and superiority over his brothers.
- Protection from the curses of others.
- To be a source of blessing to others.

The key words that Rebekah had sought for were spoken:

"Be lord over your brothers,
and may the sons of your mother bow down to you." (27:29b)

Now Jacob has obtained both the birthright and the coveted blessing from his father. Jacob has won; Esau has lost.

When Esau returns too late, his father gives him not a blessing, but a kind of anti-blessing, which is the promise that he will overthrow his brother's domination at some point (27:39-40).

K. What Kind of Blessing Is This?

What kind of blessing is this? It is clear from Isaac's reaction when he discovers the deception ("violent trembling," 27:33), that he didn't realize he was pronouncing the blessing on the wrong person.

It becomes clear that this is more than the simple blessing of a father to a son. It is a kind of spoken prophecy that comes from the Lord himself, given through Isaac as a spokesman to the person God intends to bless. We see two additional examples later in Genesis, which we'll study in detail in Lesson 20.

- Jacob's blessing of Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48)
- Jacob's blessing of his twelve sons (Genesis 49)

In each case Jacob prophesies a specific blessing, speaking of future things that he has no way of knowing except for God's word in his mouth.

In one sense, Isaac's blessing of Jacob and Esau is God's, not Isaac's. In that case, I wonder if Rebekah's and Jacob's deceitful intervention was "necessary," if God would have blessed Jacob in spite of Isaac's intentions to the contrary? Some of Isaac's blessing of Jacob might be attributed to a father's good wishes for his firstborn, but there's more. Isaac's later blessing of Esau includes at least one phrase that sounds much like prophecy:

"You will live by the sword
and you will serve your brother.
But when you grow restless,
you will throw his yoke from off your neck." (27:40)

L. "Jacob Have I loved"

We can't leave this passage without looking for a moment at God's preference of Jacob over Esau. Esau was a descendent of Abraham, but didn't have the spiritual acuity to appreciate it. Though God blessed Esau's descendents with nation-status, the country of Edom, they were subjugated again and again by the sons of Jacob (Israel).

In explaining God's sovereignty in Romans 9:10-13, Paul uses Jacob and Esau as examples, quoting Malachi:

"Was not Esau Jacob's brother?' the LORD says.
Yet I have **loved** Jacob, but Esau I have **hated**,
and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland
and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.'" (Malachi 1:2-3)

This indicates, says the Apostle Paul, "... that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works, but by him who calls" (Romans 9:11b-12a). "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort," Paul concludes, "but on God's mercy" (Roman 9:16).

God is in ultimate control and we can't do anything about it. This is hard for us humans. We don't like anyone taking away our control over our destiny -- not even God!

Did God really *love* Jacob and *hate* Esau? No. God loved them both, but for his plan of redemption, he *preferred* Jacob over Esau, and decided to bring the blessings of Abraham to the entire world through the offspring of Jacob rather than Esau. "Love" and "hate" are used hyperbolically in place of "prefer" or "show favor" in order to make a point.

M. Jacob returned to the land of Abraham and Rebekah.

Because of the great differences between Esau and Jacob, problems between the two brothers increased to the point that Esau threatened to kill Jacob.

Therefore, Jacob left his father and mother's home and began the long trek back to Mesopotamia, the land from which his grandfather, Abraham, had come.

POINT TO MESOPOTAMIA ON MAP 1.

READ Genesis 28:10-11 (NLT)

¹⁰ Meanwhile, Jacob left Beersheba and traveled toward Haran.

¹¹ At sundown he arrived at a good place to set up camp and stopped there for the night. Jacob found a stone to rest his head against and lay down to sleep.

N. JACOB'S DREAM

Theme: God communicates with man.

It was a long way from Canaan to Mesopotamia so, on his way, Jacob had to sleep out in the mountains.

Genesis 28:12-15 (NLT)

¹² As he slept, he dreamed of a stairway that reached from the earth up to heaven. And he saw the angels of God going up and down the stairway.

¹³ At the top of the stairway stood the LORD, and he said, "I am the LORD, the God of your grandfather Abraham, and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I am giving it to you and your descendants.

¹⁴ Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will spread out in all directions—to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants.

¹⁵ What's more, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. One day I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you."

Suggested Visual: CHRONOLOGICAL PICTURE

NO. 20, "JACOB'S DREAM"

Upon falling asleep, Jacob has a remarkable dream. Jacob's various encounters with God are further proof of the difference between Jacob and Esau. Scripture does not record one instance of Esau receiving a vision. However, this is God's election at work. God has chosen Jacob over Esau, but it's not because Jacob is more righteous or has better character. Yet, in the midst of all this, God is changing Jacob and making into man of God.

This dream of Jacob's has come to be known as "Jacob's Ladder".

At the top of the stairway stood God. He then gives Jacob the same promise He had given to both his father, Isaac, and his grandfather, Abraham(**28:13-15**).

The Hebrew word from which "ladder" has been translated is "Sullam". Though this is the only occurrence of the word in the Bible, the corresponding verb, "salal", means "to heap up".

The implication is somewhat akin to steps, or a ramp of some kind. Perhaps a more accurate image is that of the Babylonian stepped ziggurats. These temples would have been well known to the Babylonian Jewish writers of the Exile period.

Regardless of the form of Jacob's dream, upon awakening, he immediately recognizes the place as holy, and names it Bethel, which translates as "House of God". He commemorates the dream by erecting a stone pillar, similar to the ancient Stele (click to view Israel Stele).

The city of Bethel is 11 miles north of Jerusalem. If Jacob did travel along the route it is widely agreed upon he would have traveled, he would have crossed the Jordan south of Bethel, passing through Jericho. From Jerusalem, he would have proceeded east to Jericho. The route to Heshbon from Jericho would have connected Jacob to The Kings Highway, running north to south east of the Jordan.

Through this dream, God was showing Jacob that the coming Deliverer would bridge the gap between man and God.

- God is the only one who can make a way for us to come to Him.
- Even if a person were to do many, many good deeds to try to please God, his efforts would still not bridge the gap caused by sin.

O. Jacob, the Deceiver is Deceived.

Jacob arrives in Haran to stay with his Uncle Laban, his mother's brother. Before he left his family, Isaac blessed **Jacob** and told him, **Do not marry a Canaanite woman**. The Canaanitish people were a mixed breed. The reason for marrying within the family was to maintain the purity of the family line. The surest way to lose tribal distinction was to intermarry with people of mixed elements.

It is here that Jacob meets his Laban's younger daughter, Rachel who is at the well where they are getting water for their flocks of sheep. She just so happened to be there at the same time. Again, this is the providence of God, the invisible hand of God. His timing is always perfect.

Jacob immediately falls head over heels in love with her and after spending a month with his uncle's family, he asks Laban for her hand in marriage. Since Jacob has nothing to offer Laban in exchange for his daughter, he agrees to work for him the next 7 yrs. Well, to Jacob, the next 7 yrs seem to fly by as he anticipates his marriage to Rachel. In fact, the Bible says that Jacob considered those 7 yrs to be but a few days as he longed for his wedding day. However, there's a saying that goes "True love never runs smoothly." In fact, Jacob's joyful anticipation of marriage to Rachel turns into a nightmare.

His deceitful Uncle Laban throws a monkey wrench into the plans when he substitutes Rachel's sister, Leah, covered with a veil on Jacob's wedding night. She gets through the ceremony undetected because she is covered from head to foot. That night in the tent, Jacob still doesn't notice that this is not Rachel, probably because they're in darkness and Leah is speaking in whispers. It's in the morning as dawn breaks, that Jacob realizes he's been deceived by his uncle. Laban justifies his actions by saying that in his country, it's unheard of to marry the younger daughter before the older. However, once again, he agrees to give Rachel in marriage to Jacob if he will work for Laban another 7 yrs.

Jacob ends up spending 20 yrs with his Uncle Laban, who along the way, changes Jacob's wages 10 different times. Jacob had become so prosperous, Laban and his sons had become suspicious. Scripture indicates Jacob felt threatened by Laban's change of nature. God came to Jacob in **Genesis 31:3**, and urged him to depart at once; **"to the land of your fathers, and to your relatives, and I will be with you."**

Before Jacob and Esau were to reunite, Jacob had to thwart off Laban. Laban and his sons had pursued Jacob, and caught up with him in the hill country of Gilead. After a warning from God, Laban sought a peace treaty with Jacob. The two consummated their agreement in Mizpah-Gilead.

So here we see Jacob reaping what he has sown. He deceived his father, Isaac, by pretending to be his brother, Esau, and now he has spent 20 yrs of his life being tricked and deceived by his Uncle Laban. But it doesn't end there.

It is here in Haran that 11 of Jacob's sons are born. God blesses Leah and she gives birth to Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.

All along the way, Leah thinks that Jacob will love her more than Rachel because she is giving him sons. Rachel, who is more beautiful and has Jacob's love and devotion, becomes angry and blames Jacob for her barrenness. She yells at him, "Give me children or else I'll die!" To which, Jacob loses his cool and gets angry with Rachel, and said, 'Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?'" (Gen. 30:2).

Rachel's discontentment led her to the same kind of fleshly scheme that Abraham's wife, Sarah tried. Rachel gave her handmaid Bilhah to Jacob so that he could have a son by her, and she did it twice (30:3-8). Technically, the children of that union would be Rachel's children in their culture. But we get another glimpse into Rachel's selfish nature when Bilhah's second son is born. She said, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and I have indeed prevailed" (Gen. 30:8). She named the child Naphtali, which means "wrestling." She saw herself in a contest with her sister for first place in Jacob's estimation.

God finally gives Rachel a son, which she names Joseph. But she prays again to God, "Please give me another son." God does give Rachel one more son, Benjamin, which means "son of my sorrow." Here's the irony: Years earlier, she had screamed, "Give me children or I'll die!" and she died giving birth to her second son. They buried Rachel by the side of the road leading from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, and you can still visit her tomb today.

Jacob never got over Rachel. At 147 years of age he called his sons together in Egypt to bless them, and he was still thinking about her. "Now as for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, in the land of Canaan on the journey, when there was still some distance to go to Bethlehem; and I buried her there on the way to Bethlehem." (Gen. 48:7). He loved her to the end of his life.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves because after leaving his Uncle Laban, Jacob is about to face his brother Esau. A new chapter in the life of Jacob and Esau was about to begin. The story of the reunion between Jacob and Esau takes place in **Genesis 32**.

P. Jacob and Esau Reunite

Chapter 32 opens up with Jacob and Laban going their separate ways, at peace with each other after their pact. As Jacob moves his camp closer towards Canaan, Scripture reports "***the angels of God met him***". God obviously felt the need to further strengthen and encourage His faithful servant.

Jacob claims the place as "***the camp of God***", and names it Manaheim, which translates as such. From there, he sent messengers ahead to Esau.

Jacob and Esau had not seen each other in twenty years. Jacob wanted to entreat Esau with messages of peace and offerings of gifts to soften the anger Esau surely felt.

The messengers seem to have met Esau on the road. Scripture implies Esau had heard of Jacob's return, and had moved out northward from Edom. They report back quickly to Jacob, and inform him Esau is coming to meet him with four hundred men.

This is a testament to the wealth and might of Esau. He had prospered greatly as well during their separation. Jacob responded in verse 7 with "**great fear and distress**".

In an attempt to spare the lives of his household, he divides the camp into two groups. He then selects 580 animals, consisting of goats, sheep, cattle, camels, and asses. He divides these into five waves, and spaces each drove out at different intervals.

The intent is to flood Esau with gifts, in different stages, as he approaches Esau. Jacob shows his cleverness again in this tactic. He hopes to lessen the blunt of Esau's wrath, and hopefully turn Esau from murderous intent.

After Jacob separates the animals for Esau, he takes his two camps and crosses the Jabbok River. It is likely Jacob would have approached the river from the north, thus, he took his family across to the southern banks of the Jabbok. The exact details are not given.

Scripture seems to imply Jacob then crossed back to the other side of the river, where he spent the night alone in prayer. It was in this spot which Jacob would receive his new name.

Q. Jacob Wrestles with God

Genesis 32:22-32 (NLT)

²² During the night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two servant wives, and his eleven sons and crossed the Jabbok River with them.

²³ After taking them to the other side, he sent over all his possessions.

²⁴ This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break.

²⁵ When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket.

²⁶ Then the man said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking!" But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

²⁷ "What is your name?" the man asked. He replied, "Jacob."

²⁸ "Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him. "From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won."

²⁹ "Please tell me your name," Jacob said. "Why do you want to know my name?" the man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there.

³⁰ Jacob named the place Peniel (which means "face of God"), for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared."

³¹ The sun was rising as Jacob left Peniel, and he was limping because of the injury to his hip.

³² (Even today the people of Israel don't eat the tendon near the hip socket because of what happened that night when the man strained the tendon of Jacob's hip.)

Israel was the new name of Jacob, and was to be the name of his descendants until the end of time. The name Israel is a combination of two words; Yisra, which means "persevere with God", and the divine

name "El". Yisrael became translated Israel, from which the term Israelite came to represent members within the 12 tribes of Israel.

God had allowed Jacob/Israel to prevail in their struggle no doubt to boost his confidence. Jacob and Esau were to face each other the next day. To commemorate the experience, Jacob named the place Peniel, or, Penuel. This translates as "The Face of God". Jacob had little time to celebrate the occasion, as the very next verse indicates"

Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men". Jacob immediately set his camp behind him, as he would be the first to encounter Esau. Jacob set the maidservants and their children in the front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. Jacob then went on ahead, bowing down seven times before the feet of Esau.

"But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept."

After twenty years of separation, Jacob and Esau embraced, setting aside all their past difficulties, grudges, jealousies, and misdeeds. The two brothers were united under the loving embrace and supervision of the God of their fathers. As Ishmael and Isaac had made amends, so Jacob and Esau had as well.

Jacob's household then presents themselves to Esau, overcome with the prosperity of his younger brother. Esau then questions as to the gifts Jacob had sent, and urged him to take them back.

"I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself."

Jacob urgently requested Esau to accept the gifts, which Esau reluctantly does. Jacob and Esau had come full circle, and the Lord had seen to every step of the journey. After what was sure to have been a long talk, full of laughs and tears, the two brothers parted company once again. This time, though, the time between meetings would be much less.

Scripture indicates Esau headed back to Seir, or Edom. Esau and his descendants became known as the Edomites, and built their cities in the rugged mountains overlooking the Arabah. Teman and Bozrah were strong mountain fortresses, which overlooked and threatened to control routes through the Arabah.

Edom became a fierce enemy of Israel. Their control of the mountainous region threatened Judah's control over the Arabah, and the routes which led to Solomon's port city, Ezion-geber. David would later conquer Edom, and station troops in the land. The Edomites received damning curses for their role in Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem.

Jacob continues westward, towards Canaan. Just east of the Jordan River Jacob halted his clan. Scripture describes him as building a place for himself, and shelters for his livestock. Accordingly, he named the place Succoth, which translates as "Shelters".

He stayed here for an unspecified amount of time. The contextual evidence seems to suggest it was not a very long time. Verse 18 describes how Jacob crossed the Jordan, and camped within eyesight of the

city of Shechem. Perhaps Jacob encamped near the very same spot his grandfather Abraham had decades earlier, upon his arrival into Canaan.

The story of Jacob and Esau closes with Jacob purchasing a field near Shechem from the sons of Hamor. What had began as a struggle out of the womb, had culminated in Jacob and Esau making amends decades later. The narrative comes to a close in **Genesis 35:27-29**.

"Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba, where Abraham and Isaac had stayed. Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. Then he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him."

Next week: Lesson 20: Joseph, the Interpreter of Dreams

Let's review today's lesson.

- 1. Before Jacob and Esau were even born, what did God tell Rebecca about the two brothers who were inside the womb?** *God told her that her two sons in her womb would become two nations, and that from the very beginning, they would be rivals. One nation will be stronger than the other, and the older son will serve the younger son.*
- 2. What was the big difference between Esau and Jacob?** *Esau despised his birthright and the spiritual promises of God. Esau was living just for instant gratification whereas Jacob valued the birthright and the promises of God. Jacob believed that God had a great future in store for him.*
- 3. Which son was his father's favorite? Why?** *Esau, because he liked to be outdoors and hunt like his father.*
- 4. What did Esau do with his birthright?** *He despised his birthright and sold it or gave it away for a bowl of stew, because he was hungry.*
- 5. How did Jacob deceive his father into giving him the blessing that was intended for Esau?** *With the help and directions of his mother, Rebekah, Jacob cooks a meal of domestic livestock, then puts on Esau's gamy-smelling clothing to make his blind father think he is speaking to Esau.. Rebecca also puts goatskin pieces on Jacob's arms because he has smooth skin and his brother is very hairy-so his father will feel the arm and think he is blessing Esau. Finally, when Isaac asks Jacob directly, "Are you really my son Esau?" Jacob lies and says "I am."*
- 6. What did Jacob see in the dream given to him by God?** *He saw a stairway resting on the earth with its top reaching to Heaven. God's angels were walking up and down the ladder, and God stood above the ladder.*
- 7. What did this dream mean?** *It meant that the Deliverer, who would be the descendant of Jacob, would be like the stairway connecting the earth to Heaven. Through the Deliverer, people could be brought back into oneness with God.*
- 8. Later on, Jacob himself is on the receiving end of deception. Which relative deceived him and how did he deceive Jacob?** *Jacob flees from his brother Esau to Haran where he stays with his Uncle Laban for the next 20 yrs. His uncle manipulates and deceives Jacob into working for 14 yrs in exchange for his daughters Rachel and Leah. Laban's first deception was tricking Jacob into marrying Leah when he thought he was marrying Rachel. We also learn that Laban changes Jacob's wages ten times.*

9. In Gen. 32, Jacob wrestles with God all night long. Jacob would not let the angel go until he did what? Until he blessed him.

10. What was the blessing that Jacob received? He was given a new name, Israel, the one who perseveres with God, and was destined to become the father of 12 tribes and the nation of Israel.

11. Who are Esau's descendants? The Edomites who built their cities in Arabia, and are the Middle-eastern people who live today in Iraq, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Morocco, Jordan and Lebanon.

12. What were the two sons that Rachel gave birth to? Joseph and Benjamin

13. What happened to Rachel during the birth of her second son, Benjamin? She died giving birth to Benjamin

14. The 12 tribes that make up Israel came from where? They come from the sons of Leah, Leah's servant, Zilpah, Rachel and Rachel's servant, Bilhah. And all 12 sons have Jacob as their father.

Next Lesson 20: Joseph, the interpreter of Dreams