

JACOB  
A Flickering Faith

Someone has observed that the women and men of the Bible offer us a *mirror* rather than a *model* of a life of faith. This pregnant phrase - "a mirror, not a model" - helps us understand that Scripture can hold up to us an individual life in order to show us a person's faith-journey without suggesting that we follow any one life in all points. This concept is especially helpful as we examine a life like Jacob's. (Jesus, of course, lived the one life which is both a mirror and a model for us.)

As we will see, Jacob was from the beginning one who was a crafty and contentious schemer, in spite of divine revelations and painful humiliations. The best that might be said of him was that he was a very slow learner. And yet God chose him and gave him a place in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews (Hebrews 11:21).

Many of us are also slow learners and can identify with Jacob in his struggling faith. We all have the same God that he did. As we begin to observe Jacob's faith-journey, let's ask our God to give us the truth and the hope that will help us on our own pilgrimage of faith.

NOTE: A lot of reading is ahead as the next 3 lessons unfold. But, ah, such reading! It is the stuff of any good story: intrigue, romance, disappointment, rescue, emotion and the struggle between good and evil. You're gonna love it. So plan enough time in the coming weeks to sit down with a Good Book and learn about Jacob and Joseph and their God.

Read Genesis 25:19-34 two times, carefully and thoughtfully: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

1. Write down your observations as you read. (Do not try to interpret or apply what you see, just write down what you see.)

2. From verses 21-23, what part did God play in Jacob's destiny even before he was born?

Re-read verses 24-34.

3. What did Esau's birthright, which ordinarily belonged to the firstborn, include?  
(See Genesis 12:1-3.)

4. Considering such qualities as appearance, behavior, character and priorities, describe the sort of person each was:

a) Esau

b) Jacob

Read Genesis 27:1-45.

Consider chapter 27 against the backdrop of the events in chapter 25. In your considerations, be sure to include the divine prediction in Genesis 25:23. This prediction amounts to a promise of God and would certainly have been understood as such by all involved back then.

5. Now, thinking of the account in chapter 27, comment on each person's behavior in light of what had gone before:

a) Isaac's

b) Esau's

c) Jacob's and Rebekah's

6. In thinking about Jacob as he is portrayed in chapters 25 and 27, did he value and desire what God had promised would be his? Explain.

7. At this point in Jacob's saga, what was he depending on to bring the promise to fulfillment? Explain.

8. Jacob took matters into his own hands rather than waiting on God either to tell him what to do next or to work out the situation without any active participation on Jacob's part. What was the effect on all concerned?

Esau now is filled with fury and murderous intent toward Jacob (whose name means "supplanter") since Jacob had once again wrenched the blessing from him. At this point Rebekah wisely urged Isaac to send Jacob to her brother's land to seek a wife. (She never saw her much-loved son again.) Chapter 28:10 begins with Jacob on the journey.

Read Genesis 28:10-22.

9. What does God promise Jacob?

10. What kind of words would you use to describe the character of this particular promise of God to Jacob? (For example: generous or stingy, positive or negative, etc. Reflect on the promise and use as many words as you can.)

11. a) As far as we can tell from the preceding chapters, was God obligated to initiate this encounter with Jacob?

b) Do you think Jacob deserved such an encounter? Explain.

c) If you met a child of yours after he had behaved like Jacob had, what might be the character of your words to him?

d) What conclusions can you draw about the character of God from this encounter?

Jacob awoke in awe and a healthy fear of the Lord (Psalm 111:10). He memorialized the place with the stone pillar and called it Bethel, which means "house of God." Next he made a vow to God.

12. What do Jacob's initial responses (verses 16-19) coupled with the conditional character ("if...then") of Jacob's vow to God (verses 20-22) suggest about him and his faith at this point?

IN SUMMARY: (Think through all of the passages concerning Jacob thus far.)

13. a) Would God have fulfilled His promises without Jacob's manipulation or does God only help those who help themselves?
- b) What do you think Jacob lost in the midst of his self-reliant scheming? (Think about his state of mind and his relationship to God.)
14. WE ARE ALL LIKE JACOB. But do we know it?
- a) What are some ways we at times try to manipulate and/or work things out as though everything depends on us rather than on God. (Think about how we use our tongues, our thoughts, our prayers and any other behavior that comes to mind.)
- b) In what situations do you find yourself resorting to such tactics?
- c) What do you often lose in the process?
15. Where do you see a flicker of faith as you reflect on Jacob's story thus far?
16. In what ways do you see God fanning the flame of Jacob's faith so that it will grow stronger and brighter?
17. What changes would you like to make in your approach to life as you reflect on Jacob's story? (Consider attitudes, behaviors and specific situations.)
18. What encouragement do you get for your faith-journey as you think about the kind of person Jacob is and the way God relates to him?

