

Study Guide

Series: Wrestling with God – The Story of Jacob

“Birthrights, Blessings, and a Bowl of Stew”

Monday – Genesis 25:19-26. Twin boys – and they were trouble from the start. Rebekah could feel them grappling before they were born. Why does Genesis stress that Jacob was born “grasping his brother’s heel”? To “grasp the heel” was a Hebrew way of saying a person was devious. (We still call people like that “heels”!) So, Jacob, Abraham’s grandson, enters the Bible story. Jacob’s descendant, Jesus, quoted Exodus 3:6, where God self-identifies as “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” (Mark 12:26-27) What barriers could have kept Jacob from being a great patriarch, a key person in history? What barriers are you experiencing in your own life in following God? These Hebrew stories omit so much we’d like to know. It’s clear, however, that Isaac and Rebekah turned to God with their concerns and found divine guidance and help. Have you made it a central part of your life to “inquire of the Lord”? Do you have mentors or models who help you know how to do that?

Tuesday - Genesis 25:27-34. Isaac’s boys were twins, true, but hardly alike! Esau traded his birthright for a bowl of stew. What’s a “birthright”? In their culture, the oldest son inherited twice as much as others. The birthright also implied family leadership. Genesis saw Esau as both foolish and disloyal to give it away so casually. Jacob was sharp in all of the positive and negatives senses that term can carry. What do you learn about yourself through your responses to this story? Are you more apt to admire Jacob or to deplore the way he treated Esau? With which qualities in each of the brothers do you most identify? The nation of Edom (Esau’s descendants) was next to Israel in the desert by the Dead Sea, was mostly hostile, and cheered when Israel was crushed (Psalm 137:7). How can you act to keep conflicts in your family or work from having long-lasting results?

Wednesday – Genesis 26:34 – 27:29. Both Isaac and Rebekah played favorites (Genesis 25:28). Isaac tried to flout custom by giving a parting blessing only to Esau, his chosen. Rebekah overheard. She and Jacob fooled nearly blind Isaac and Jacob got the blessing. Jacob now had all of Esau’s birthright. Genesis is bluntly frank about Isaac’s family, the keepers of the covenant! Usually, a father called all his sons around his deathbed and blessed each one (see Genesis 49). Isaac was not just a naive victim, he tried to bypass Jacob. Do you believe God could have worked in this situation without Rebekah’s deceit or not? How do you decide when to wait and trust God and when you need to act? Genesis hints in many ways that Esau was not likely to carry on Abraham’s covenant with God (e.g. Genesis 26:34-35). What do you learn about God’s heart from God’s readiness to work with Jacob, despite Jacob’s flaws? In what ways has God had to be patient with you?

Thursday – Genesis 27:30-41. Esau’s return exposed Jacob’s fraud, but too late. You may ask, “Why not just take back the blessing or say it again to Esau?” Isaac’s world saw words as potent, not trivial (unlike ours, which says, “They’re just words”). Often we can’t just say, “I didn’t mean it” and undo the harm words cause. Esau’s words at the end were angry and ominous. Isaac and Jacob’s culture may have been a little “over the top” on the permanent nature of words. We, on the other hand, are probably too casual about that (see James 3:2-11). When have you

wished you could take back words that were irretrievably gone? When have “just words” uplifted and blessed you? Only late in the story does Esau show any interest in or appreciation for the blessing and birthright that might have been his. How might his life have been different if he had valued them from the start? Now he became angry and bitter. What healthier, more healing ways have you found to deal with your regrets and hurts?

Friday – Genesis 27:42 – 28:22. Jacob ran for his life. Isaac didn’t think the plotting and hurt wiped out God’s covenant with Abraham (28:3-4). And God went with Jacob. Did you ever sing “Jacob’s Ladder”? In Jacob’s dream, the Lord at the top of the ladder promised him safety and a role in God’s grand story. Jacob inherited the covenant promises, not because he was great, but because God is. As to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, so here God promised Jacob that his descendants would be a blessing for all peoples on earth. How does this “blessed to be a blessing” theme shape your grasp of what it meant for God to bless Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? How does it challenge you to use the blessings in your life? Genesis says that when Jacob awoke, he said, “Surely the Lord God is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” Have you ever had a moment like that—an uncanny sense that “God is in this place, this person, this event—and I had missed it”? How can you become more aware of God’s presence in your life?