

Lesson Seven: Jacob, The Man Who Finished Strong

If I were going to pick men and women to help carry out an enormous promise, would I choose men who were liars, who were willing to deceive those closest to them, who were self-centered? I think not. However, strangely enough, that's exactly what God did. He reminds us that His ways are not our ways. He has different reasoning in choosing men through whom He would carry out His promise to Abraham. I admit that I don't understand God's thinking, but I am so thankful that He did choose imperfect men and women to fulfill His plan. That gives me great hope that God could use even me, an imperfect sinner. Last week as we studied the life of Isaac, we saw how Jacob stole his brother's blessing. Jacob had a deceitful heart. Yet as we study his life this week, we will see how God used him to carry out His promise to Abraham. As you look back over the previous weeks, every character we have studied so far in Hebrews 11, other than Abel and Enoch, had something negative in their lives. They were not perfect, yet God called them men and women of faith. Be encouraged that God uses imperfect people, and be reminded that our mistakes don't disqualify us from living by faith and being called faithful.

"Lord, I know I am far from perfect, and I have made many mistakes in my life. Thank you for reminding me that my mistakes do not have to render me unusable. Teach me from Jacob's life. Encourage my heart as I see how you worked in and through his life."

DAY 1: A Turning Point in Jacob's Life

LOOKING TO GOD'S WORD

GENESIS 27:41-28:9

1. Why was Jacob sent away? How does Rebekah's dishonesty with Isaac show itself again?

2. What was included in Isaac's blessing of Jacob?

GENESIS 28:10-22

3. Why would this have been a good time for God to appear to Jacob?
4. What was God's purpose in the dream? What did He promise Jacob?
5. How was this encounter with God a turning point in Jacob's life?
6. Was Jacob bargaining with God here? What do you think the intent of his heart was in verses 20-22?

LOOKING UPWARD

7. What has God used to get your attention?
8. How have you seen God encourage you after you've "blown it"?

LOOKING DEEPER

- In Genesis 28:3 Isaac called God by the name God Almighty, or "El-Shaddai" in Hebrew. At what other times was this name used?

Genesis 17:1

Genesis 35:9-12

- Why was this name specifically appropriate for the situation?

LOOKING REFLECTIVELY

God does not give up on us even though we make mistakes in life.

- Think back to a recent situation where you feel that you “blew it.” How did you see God’s faithfulness in your life?

God is faithful to His Word.

- Do you struggle with believing God for His promises in His Word? If so, why?

DAY 2: Jacob and Rachel

LOOKING TO GOD’S WORD

GENESIS 29:1-30

1. Describe Jacob’s relationship with Rachel. What stands out to you?

2. How did Laban change in his interaction and dealings with Jacob over time?

3. We are told in 29:31 that Rachel was barren. How did Jacob and Rachel handle this according to Genesis 30:1-4? What were their different perspectives on her barrenness? Where did each place blame?

LOOKING UPWARD

4. What are some lessons for life that we can learn from this passage?

5. Jacob waited many years for the wife he loved. Is there something you are waiting for, and if so, how are you handling the waiting?

6. When life doesn't go as you had hoped, how do you respond? How should you respond?

LOOKING DEEPER

All three wives of the men God promised many descendants to (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) were barren. How did each man respond to this situation and what were the results according to Genesis 16:1-6; 25:19-21; and 30:1-4?

LOOKING REFLECTIVELY

Waiting on God is not easy, but the end result is worth it. Trust that He is in control and His timing is perfect.

- Take some time to be honest with God. Tell Him how you're feeling about what's going on in your life. Then leave it in His sovereign, loving hands.

- What verses come to mind that encourage you in waiting on God? Meditate on one of them today.

DAY 3: Jacob's Family

LOOKING TO GOD'S WORD

GENESIS 29:31-35, GENESIS 30:1-24, GENESIS 35:16-19

1. As you read these passages, list Jacob's children in the order they were born under each wife or maidservant. This is the origination of the twelve tribes of Israel (Jacob's sons).

Leah	Bilhah (R)	Zilpah (L)	Rachel
1.	5.	7.	12.
2.	6.	8.	13.
3.			
4.			
9.			
10.			
11.			

2. Now go back through each birth and list why Rachel and Leah named each child the way they did.

3. How would you describe the relationship between Leah and Rachel?

LOOKING UPWARD

4. How do you see God's involvement in each woman's life?

5. What insight does Rachel's bargaining with Leah for Reuben's mandrakes in Genesis 30:14-16 give into Rachel's heart?

LOOKING DEEPER

- Why was Reuben, the first-born, passed over and his birthright given to Joseph's sons according to Genesis 35:22 and 1 Chronicles 5:1?

- For another summary of Jacob's twelve sons, look at Genesis 35:22-26.

LOOKING REFLECTIVELY

I wish I could say that I readily accept God's hand in every situation He places in my life, but, in all honesty, I cannot. Yes, I usually get to that point, but only after going through a process of emotions. When I'm disappointed or my hopes have been crushed, my first inclination is not to jump up and down and say, "Praise the Lord." To the contrary, I tend to start out with negative emotions, such as discouragement, self-pity, anger, doubt, and on and on. (You get the idea.) I have learned that it is okay to be honest with God about how I feel, but I can't stop there. I must give my emotions to the Lord and let Him take them. I tell Him how I'm feeling specifically. If I'm angry with Him, or questioning what He's doing, I'm honest with Him. I cry. I speak my mind. But then He brings me to the place where I ask Him to take my emotions and replace them with His peace that He is in control.

When God asks us to wait on Him, we must choose how we will respond.

Will you be impatient and take things into your own hands? Will you become angry with God and others? Or will you quietly trust in His perfect timing and His perfect will?

Day 4: Jacob's Second Encounter with God

The story of Jacob spans many chapters in the book of Genesis. Because of time limitation, we will not be able to study every chapter. Genesis 30:25-43 tells us the story of the increasing tension between Jacob and Laban. After faithfully serving Laban for 14 years in return for his daughters, Leah and Rachel, Jacob requested that he be released of further responsibility and allowed to take his family and return to his home land. Laban urged him to stay, discerning that God had blessed him because of Jacob. Pressed further, Jacob agreed to stay, but only after driving a hard bargain concerning wages and other provisions. Laban agreed, but in his crafty nature, he later changed the terms of agreement after it was in place (Gen. 30:35-36). Jacob responded in his own devious way, resulting in increasing wealth for himself at Laban's expense (30:37-43). The situation was clearly worsening, so Jacob, following God's prompting (31:3, 11-13), resolved to return to Canaan. When Laban discovered that Jacob had secretly fled with his family, Laban pursued them. Rachel had

stolen her father's household idols, but was able to conceal them from Laban. Even though Laban had accused Jacob of the theft, he could find no proof that Jacob had indeed taken the idols (31:31:17-42). Finally, they made a covenant with one another, and Laban returned home, and Jacob headed out for his home land (31:43-55). This is where we pick up the story.

LOOKING TO GOD'S WORD

GENESIS 32:1-32

1. Why was this a good time for God to appear to Jacob again?
2. What do you learn about Jacob and his relationship with God from his prayer in verses 9-12?
3. What are some possible reasons why God caused Jacob to limp in verses 24-32?
4. How did this encounter impact Jacob's life?

LOOKING UPWARD

5. What does it mean to "wrestle with God?"
6. Have you "wrestled with God" about something? What were the results?

LOOKING DEEPER

- What were the differences in this encounter and the first encounter with God in Genesis 28:10-22?
- How has Jacob changed since the first encounter?
- As you look at notes in the margin of your Bible or a Study Bible, why did God change Jacob's name to Israel? Why was this new name appropriate for Jacob and what does it signify?

LOOKING REFLECTIVELY

God has to “cripple” us sometimes before we let go of our self-sufficiency and depend on His all-sufficiency.

- Where do you tend to be self-sufficient?
- How has God brought you to a place of total dependence on Him?

God wants us to grab hold of Him and never let go.

- If you're not holding onto God, what are you holding onto?

DAY 5: Jacob's Final Days

LOOKING TO GOD'S WORD

HEBREWS 11:21

1. What two things do we learn about Jacob at the end of his life from this verse?

GENESIS 48:1-22

2. We now move ahead in our story to the end of Jacob's life after he was reunited with Joseph in Egypt. What was unique about Manasseh and Ephraim? (See also Gen. 41:51-51.)

3. Why was his adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim as his own significant?

4. In verses 15-16, how does Jacob view God at this point in his life?

5. How do you see God's sovereign hand at work in what happened here?

LOOKING UPWARD

6. Jacob's life was dominated by struggle with people (his father Isaac, his brother Esau, his father-in-law Laban, his wives, and God). What would you say has dominated your life?

7. Jacob (Israel) reversed the order of the blessing on Joseph's two sons. Joseph tried to stop him but Jacob knew what he was doing. When you struggle with asking God "why" when things don't make sense, what verses do you cling to?

LOOKING DEEPER

GENESIS 47:7-9

- How old was Jacob when Joseph brought him to Egypt?
- Describe Jacob's outlook on his life at this point.

HOSEA 12:2-5

- What additional insight does this passage give concerning Jacob?

LOOKING REFLECTIVELY

God doesn't always make logical sense to us in what He does, but He wants us to trust His hand and His heart.

- Will you trust Him regardless of whether you understand what He's doing?
- Meditate on one of the verses you listed in question 6.

What matters is not how we start out, but how we finish our lives.

- What do you need to do in order to finish strong for the Lord?

Jacob started off a little shaky in his life. He deceived his brother under his mother's direction, but against his better judgment. He was forced to flee his home to avoid his brother's wrath. But once again, God brought good out of a bad situation. By leaving his home and going to his mother's relatives, he met his wives, and most importantly, he met God. Jacob's life was indeed a spiritual journey, but one that should encourage us as we see God's hand on him every step of the way. He started out as a deceiving, self-centered young man. But once he came face to face with God, his life was never the same again. Even his name had to be changed because of his life change. God took an imperfect man, changed him, and used him to fulfill His promise to Abraham. And at the end of his life, he was worshipping God. That's how it should be.