

JACOB (Israel)

Introduction

Jacob was the third patriarch of the Old Testament (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), leading to the nation of Israel and extending a chosen lineage from Abraham to the birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ (**Matthew 1:1-17**). Reading about the first two patriarchs, **Abraham** and **Isaac**, in Resources will provide good background for this article on Jacob.

Jacob's Family and the Great Deception

Isaac and Rebekah were Jacob's parents. Rebekah, like other women in her family before her, was barren. Isaac and Rebekah prayed to God for a child and their prayers were answered. Rebekah conceived (**Genesis 25:19-21**).

Even before he was born, Jacob made himself known. He and his twin within their mother's womb were kicking and moving around more than would normally be experienced in pregnancy. Rebekah sensed they were fighting with each and asked God for the reason. The Lord revealed this to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger" (**Genesis 25:22-24**).

Rebekah gave birth to twin boys. The first was covered with a lot of red hair and was named, Esau, which, derived from a Hebrew word, meant *hairy*. Esau also had the nicknames – Edom, meaning *red*, and Seir, which expresses *intense negative emotion* and the *experience of violence*. When the second twin was born, his hand was grasping the heel of his brother, Esau. Isaac and Rebekah named him Jacob, meaning *he grasps the heel* and, figuratively, *he deceives*, a hallmark of his life.

Esau, the first-born, was brawny with a thick covering of hair. He was an outdoorsman and a skilled hunter. Jacob, on the other hand, was smooth-skinned, quiet, and preferred staying at home, learning to cook and doing other domestic activities. One day when they were older, Esau came in from the field after hunting and was very hungry. Jacob was fixing stew; Esau asked for some. Jacob indicated he could have some stew if Esau sold him his birthright. Esau was so desperate for food that he swore an oath and sold his birthright to Jacob. After eating his fill of stew and departing

Esau would, from that day on, despise his brother for deceiving him (**Genesis 25:29-34**).

When Isaac was old, nearly blind, and nearing death, he summoned his older son, Esau, asking him to hunt and prepare a sumptuous meal, and promised his birthright blessing on him. Rebekah had heard what Isaac said and shared those words with Jacob. The two of them, with Jacob taking the lead, deceived Isaac with a tremendous feast after which Isaac blessed Jacob (**Genesis 27:27-29**).

Esau returned from hunting, prepared a feast, and brought it to his father. Isaac questioned who he was and was surprised to learn that he had been deceived and blessed the wrong son. Esau was furious and wailed loudly, demanding a blessing. Isaac said he could not undo the blessing already given to Jacob, but did pronounce, as Esau wept loudly, a more ominous future away from his family, filled with violence, and in subjection to his younger brother (**Genesis 27:30-40**).

Great enmity between the twins ensued. Esau married a Canaanite woman, the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son by his Egyptian handmaid Hagar, something that would have grieved his father (**Genesis 28:6-9**). Jacob took two wives, Leah and Rachel, daughters of his uncle, Laban (**Genesis 28:10-30:24**).

Wrestling With God

Jacob had already experienced a dream from God about who he was to become and the blessings he would realize (**Genesis 28:10-22**). Before that would come to fruition, God needed to change Jacob's heart. One night while alone, Jacob wrestled all night long with God (**Genesis 32:22-32**) and would name the place *Peniel*, meaning *face of God* because, Jacob said, "I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared" (**Genesis 32:30**).

During his wrestling match with God, Jacob's hip was injured, but Jacob would not stop wrestling with God until God pronounced a blessing on him. God did just that and then renamed Jacob – *Israel*, meaning *he struggles with God*. Having been humbled by God with a permanent limp, Jacob's personal struggle with God may have abated, but his legacy of struggling with God would continue in the nation bearing his name, Israel, long after this event.

Jacob's Significance

Jacob's significance came from the family he brought into this world, fruit of the blessing at Peniel. He fathered thirteen children, twelve sons and one daughter, by four different

women. His wife, Leah, bore him seven children (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dinah, Issachar and Zebulun, and two more from her handmaid, Zilpah – Gad and Asher). His wife, Rachel, bore him two children (**Joseph** and Benjamin, as well as two from her handmaid, Bilhah – Dan and Naphtali. Jacob's twelve sons (**Genesis 35:23-26**) became the heads of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. These 12 tribes of Hebrew people and their descendants were the recipients of God's promises, blessings, and curses.

Esau (Edom) became the head of the Edomites (**Genesis 36:9-43**), a Canaanite nation and part of the heritage of Ishmael that would long vex the Israelites, confirming God's word to Rebekah when she felt her twins, Esau and Jacob, wrestling in her womb for dominance. As recorded in the pages of the Old Testament, Israel constantly struggled with God, leading to transition from the Old Covenant of the Law to the New Covenant of grace through Jesus Christ.

[Lessons We Learn from Jacob](#)

Jacob was a fore type of repentant sinners who give their lives to God through Jesus. Even we, like Jacob who struggled with God, can have a restored relationship with God when we humble ourselves and confess our sins. Brokenness and repentance lead to transformation and a new identity in Jesus Christ, just like Jacob experienced with God at Peniel.

This is an introduction on the subject of **Jacob (Israel)**. Here are a few other resources you may wish to explore:

[Who was Jacob in the Bible? | GotQuestions.org](#)

[The Story of Jacob \(biblehub.com\)](#)

[biblestudytools.com](#)

[christianmeaningofnames.com](#)

[What is the birth order of Jacob's thirteen children? \(compellingtruth.org\)](#)

[hebrewname.org](#)

[bible.org](#)