

## Week 2: Jacob

**Connect:** choose 1 *Connect* question and discuss for 5-7 minutes.

- A high and low of your week (best and worst parts of the week).
- Where did you see God at work around and in you this last week?

**Read these passages aloud:**

**Genesis 25:19-28** – The Birth of Jacob & Esau

**Genesis 27:1-28:5** – Isaac’s blessing

**Genesis 32:3-32** – Jacob afraid and wrestles with God

**Engage the text as a group:**

1. What do you **observe** in the passages?
  - How would you describe Jacob, Esau, Isaac, Rebekah? Their relationships?
  - What was Isaac’s blessing meant to do?
  - How is Jacob’s disposition different here 20 years later, compared to when he tricked his father and stole his brother’s blessing?
  - How is Jacob’s encounter with the one he wrestles with?
2. What **questions** do you have of the text?
  - Why the favoritism? Why did Rebekah deceive her husband? Why did Isaac intend to bless only one son?

### Why does Jacob matter?

Jacob is part of the line in the family whom God promised to bless in order to be a blessing to all other families of the world.<sup>1</sup> It is from his encounter with God wrestling through the night, where he receives his new name, Israel, for which his descendants would come to be known. The people of Israel are God’s chosen people throughout the Old Testament—the people with whom God enters into a particular and special relationship to bear witness to the rest of the world of the one true God.

Jacob’s name means “he takes by the heel” or “he cheats.”<sup>2</sup> Coming out of the womb, he grasped his brother’s heel, already a ‘cheater.’ Jacob is conniving, smart, and works it to get what he wants. He meets his match in Laban, his future father-in-law who would trick him and

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 12:1-3. Jacob is the son of Isaac and Rebekah, the son of Abraham and Sarah.

<sup>2</sup> Disclaimer: if your name is Jacob, this does not mean that *you* are a deceiver or cheat.

bind him to working for him for 20 years unfairly.<sup>3</sup> When Jacob finally leaves Laban’s household to return to his own land, the encounter with his brother, Esau whom he stole from and tricked, has him fearful for his and his family’s life. It is in this weakness of spirit and fearful state that he meets God, wrestles with God, and refuses to let go until he receives a blessing. And God gives him that blessing, along with a wound in his hip, and a new name—Israel, “the one who strives with God” or “God strives.” He is marked with a new identity—no longer as a ‘cheat’ but as one with whom God has reckoned or contended.

God chooses Jacob, as God chose Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah before him—not because he is worthy—in fact, he’s everything but worthy, remember, he was a cheater, liar, and conniving. But this shows the grace and mercy of God who chooses us not because we are worthy but because God is a God of unfathomable love, grace, and mercy.

### HOW DOES JACOB POINT US TO JESUS?

“Israel” means ‘one who has striven with God’ or ‘God strives.’ Who of us human beings has striven with God or with whom God has striven as immensely as Jesus Christ, the God-human? Who has wrestled with God through the darkness of three days in the grave to arise wounded with holes in his hands and feet and a wound in his side, but with the blessing of resurrection life in himself and for us? Jesus is the ultimate Jacob-Israel. But Jesus has stolen nothing, deceived none, and yet, he bore the repercussions of sin in his very body. Jacob had what was coming to him from Laban’s trickery for what he had done to Esau. Jesus didn’t have any of what he suffered coming to him; but he took it anyway for love of us who are the descendants of Jacob-Israel, the children as plenty as grains of sand whom God so long ago promised Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob.

The people of Israel and the ethnic Jew descended from Jacob-Israel’s line. Jesus of Nazareth was born into that line. But, by Jesus’ death and resurrection, now even if you are not an ethnic Jew, you are grafted into that great family line by faith in Jesus. You join that promised people of God, now called the Church.<sup>4</sup>

Jacob reminds us that it is not our worthiness or goodness or cunning that earns us a place in God’s family. No, it’s God’s love and wisdom and gracious choosing of us, the people of God, the church. God graciously makes us his own, gives us a new identity in Christ.<sup>5</sup>

3. What **applications** might this passage have for our lives and context today?

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 28-31.

<sup>4</sup> The Church, capital C, refers to the entire Body of Christ, not divided by time, history or geography, but all Christians, all followers of Jesus.

<sup>5</sup> Romans 6:1-11.

- What good, important gifts are we given that we “despise” or take lightly, not hold for their value?
- Where have you known or experienced favoritism (either you were or weren’t the favorite)? What did that feel like? What was the outcome?
- Where do you wrestle with God?
- Where have you experienced a wound come with blessing?

**6 tools for interpretation:** read through the 6 Tools (if time allows) or take-home and read.

**Literary:** Genesis is a narrative.<sup>6</sup>

**Historical:** Jacob is the son of Isaac & Rebekah, grandson of Abraham & Sarah. Lineage of Israel, the people of God comes from his new name.

**Theological:** God chooses Jacob, not because of worthiness, but by God’s grace and wisdom. God chooses the ‘weak’—not the first of the twins who gets blessing, but second – God flips it.

**Cultural:** Firstborns had birthrights. Esau giving away his birthright and Jacob taking it is treating something important very lightly. The giving of new names = the giving of a new identity.

**The bigger story:** the people of Israel whom the whole Old and New Testaments address and reference are derived from the name of this forefather, Israel, formerly Jacob.

**Holy Spirit:** the Spirit was with Jacob through his family exile and return to Esau. The reconciliation between Jacob and Esau communicates the Spirit’s reconciling work.

**Video:**

For a good summary on the life of Jacob, watch the video “Read Scripture: Genesis Ch. 12-50 from *The Bible Project* to close, from minute 4:20-5:20 at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4isSyennFo&t=205s>

**Close in Prayer:**

Turn the themes of deceit, betrayal, parental favoritism, and broken family relationships into prayer.

*Thank you, Lord God, that you do not love us based on our merits, how good we are or how worthy we are—because we aren’t. Thank you for your love that is boundless and eternal and makes no sense. You are gracious and merciful and wonderful. Thank you for choosing us your*

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<sup>6</sup> Refer to “Week 1: Hagar” for more on the **6 Tools for Interpretation** for Genesis.

*people and making us your own. .” Forgive us for the way we play favorites, God; heal us where we’ve been hurt by broken family relationships.*

*If we haven’t responded to your invitation to be a part of your family, help us by your Holy Spirit to respond now with a simple, “Yes, Jesus, I believe you are God and Lord of my life. It’s in his name that we pray. Amen.*