

• *Jacob's story*

A new section of Genesis, starting in Genesis 25:19, focuses on the next person that God is going to use in bringing in His salvation, and that is Jacob. Although it is the 'account of Isaac' <sup>1</sup>, the word 'account' refers to the 'offspring' of someone or something, and so it deals more with Jacob and Esau than with Isaac himself.

<sup>1</sup> 25:19

**1. Jacob - a man with a difficult personality.**

• *His name means 'grabber'*

1. **Jacob was a man with a difficult personality.** His very name, Jacob, means 'someone who grasps hold of the heel' or (to put it simply) 'Grabber'. It turned out to be prophetic. Isaac married Rebekah. Like Sarah many years before, she was unable to have children <sup>1</sup>. Isaac prays for Rebekah and she conceives <sup>2</sup>. One part of husbandly responsibility is that of intercession. Rebekah was conscious of something unusual happening within her, and asks God about it <sup>3</sup>. She gets an answer. The two children are the forefathers of two nations <sup>4</sup>; the nations will be Israel and Edom. When the boys were born, Jacob was born grasping Esau's heel <sup>5</sup>. He lived that way all of his life. He was a 'Grabber' by name and a 'Grabber' by nature.

<sup>1</sup> 25:19-20

<sup>2</sup> 25:21

<sup>3</sup> 25:22

<sup>4</sup> 25:23

<sup>5</sup> 25:24-26

• *His mother's - favourite - loved the 'easy life'*

Jacob was a very home-loving person. He was rather soft, and loved an easy life. He liked his home comforts. Esau liked hunting, but not Jacob. The story in Genesis jumps forward to the days when the two boys are young men. One loves hunting and is his father's favourite; the other loves home and is his mother's favourite <sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> 25:27-28

• *A crafty man - persuades his brother Esau to sell his birthright*

Jacob has a crafty streak in his character. One day Esau comes in starving, and as he arrives Jacob happens to be cooking some stew <sup>1</sup>. Esau asks for some, and Jacob uses the occasion to get for himself the birthright. 'Sell me the birthright,' says Jacob, and he is careful to have it given to him as a matter of oath <sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> 25:29-30

<sup>2</sup> 25:31-34

• *Seized for himself what was normally the privilege of the family leader*

This is typical of Jacob. The 'birthright' is the privilege of being the leader of the family. Normally it would belong to the firstborn. In the case of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob the 'birthright' that is being handed down included the promise of worldwide blessing coming through the line of Abraham. In despising the birthright Esau is despising the privilege of being used by God to fulfil His purpose. Jacob, although a crafty character, is sufficiently interested in the things of God as to wish he was the son who would carry forward the purposes of God. When he found an opportunity, true to his name, he grabbed it from Esau. This was typical of Jacob. He was quick to get something for himself.

• *A quick thinker - ready to exploit situations*

Jacob was a thinker rather than a doer. The stories of how he exploited Esau show him to be a quick thinker. When Esau came home starving Jacob was instantly ready to think how he could exploit the situation to his own advantage.

• *Temperament - a collection of strengths and weaknesses*

Temperament is something you are born with. It never changes completely. Each person has his own collection of strengths and weaknesses. Some people are greedier, more ambitious by nature, than others. Some are born activists. Some are born with strong emotional tendencies. Some are born highly intelligent. Each person has his own temperamental problems. No one is a perfectly balanced character.

## 2. God was determined to have him and use him

• Chosen by God – not because of his good qualities and despite his disabilities

• If God ever uses us at all it will be entirely from His goodness and mercy

• God's grace

• But God changes us – as he changed Jacob

2. Jacob had one thing working in his favour, which was that God was determined to have him and use him. Do you have a character that you think is a disability? You say to yourself 'God would never use a person like me.' Jacob was not the kind of person you think God would choose. But God had determined that He would use Jacob. The on-going line leading to Jesus would run through Jacob. Crafty Jacob had been chosen by God!

He was chosen before he was born. His future was planned by God. His being chosen by God had nothing to do with anything good in him. He was not chosen because of his good works. He was not a better person than Esau. Had we known both boys we might have liked Esau more than Jacob. Jacob was not God's servant because he was born good. He was not hindered from being God's servant because he was born bad. The purpose of God was not thrown aside just because Jacob was such a weak and twisted character. God chose to have him, no matter what disabilities he might have.

If God ever uses you it is not because you are a good person by nature and you deserve to be used. If God ever uses you at all it will be entirely from God's goodness and mercy. When Rebekah had conceived by one man, although he had not yet been born and had done nothing good or bad, God was determining to have and to use Jacob. Quite independently of what his weaknesses of character might be, God decided to have him and use him. God can use you, just as He used Jacob, taking no notice of what Jacob's character was. God can do this because of Jesus. Jesus is our substitute before God. God can take hold of crooked personalities because Jesus has died for us. God can use us despite our sins, because Jesus died for them.

If God uses you the way He used Jacob, it will have to be by God's grace. We can never stand before God because of how good we are! Your works do not come into it. Your weaknesses and sins do not come into it either, because God saves you by grace.

Of course, God will change you! God chooses Jacob just as he is with his twisted character, but God does not leave Jacob just as he is. God begins to work in Jacob's life. That is how you become the servant of God. It starts with God's grace. Our God is 'the God of Jacob', the God who comes to twisted characters and saves them by His grace.



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