THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR FAITH

JESUS CHRIST
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Faith Lessons from the Life of Jacob
Terence Highsmith

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about the author

Terence Highsmith currently serves the Light church of Christ in Huntsville, Alabama. He completed the M.Div. program at Harding School of Theology in July 2018 and received his diploma in May 2019. He has studied at Heritage University (formerly International Bible College), University of Phoenix, and East Carolina University.

Brother Highsmith has served churches of Christ in Alabama, Virginia, North Carolina, and Connecticut. He previously served as associate minister for the Sterling Boulevard church of Christ (Sheffield, Alabama) and evangelist for the Huntsville Inner City Ministry (Alabama). He and his wife, Elizabeth, have been married over 20 years and have four children.
The goal of this lesson series is to examine the life of Jacob in order to better learn what it means to live by faith. The 13 lessons in this book were previously taught at the Westview church of Christ in Huntsville, Alabama in 2017 as part of a year-long journey through the Book of Genesis. Personally, I experienced a deeper awareness of the power and majesty of our Sovereign God. Despite humanity’s rebellion, He has mercifully chosen to extend His love to us so that we might have life with Him. I have been deeply humbled by the fact that He has chosen to love and use flawed men and women throughout history to accomplish His grand purpose of salvation.

In the command to put on the armor of God, the Apostle Paul wrote, “in all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one” (Ephesians 6:16). Paul envisioned the Christian life as a battle against an adversary who would launch flaming darts of unbelief, selfishness, fear, conflict, and disappointment against the believer. The only way the Christian can survive such an onslaught is through the power and protection of God. Trust in and reliance upon God is an absolute necessity for surviving the spiritual battle in which we live. Prayerfully the lessons in this book will encourage you take up your shield daily.
lesson 1

Struggle in the Womb

God Hears Your Prayers

The long-awaited birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah represents a key moment in salvation history. Isaac, not Ishmael, inherited the covenantal promises given to Abraham by God (Genesis 12:1-3) and therefore, bore the responsibility of remaining faithful to the covenant. By faith and through God’s providence, Abraham arranged Isaac’s marriage to Rebekah. In addition, Abraham secured Isaac’s inheritance in the land by giving the son of promise everything he owned and by sending the sons of his concubines away from Isaac toward the east country (Genesis 25:5-7). Abraham died at age 175, having lived a life of faith to the very end. God continued to bless Isaac after Abraham’s death (Genesis 25:11).

However, Isaac and Rebekah faced the same test of faith that Isaac’s parents faced: barrenness. Instead of demonstrating impatience and frustration as his parents did (Genesis 16), Isaac labored in prayer to the Lord for Rebekah, most likely over the course of 19 years. Here we learn that prayer was a significant part of the couple’s life. Even though it may have seemed that his prayers were falling on deaf ears, Isaac showed faithful persistence over the years of Rebekah’s barrenness. His example should challenge us to “always pray and not lose heart” whenever we encounter difficult situations and obstacles in life, just as
Jesus taught his disciples to do (Luke 18:1-8). We must exhibit total dependence on God to fulfill His promises instead of our own strivings and schemes. Isaac’s example also should challenge husbands to be sensitive to and to pray for the concerns and needs of their wives.

The Lord answered Isaac’s prayers, and Rebekah conceived (Genesis 25:21). However, joy soon turned into turbulence as Rebekah’s children struggled within her womb. Again, we see an example of a faithful person turning to God as Rebekah inquired of the Lord to seek an answer and to find relief from her painful pregnancy (25:22). The Lord responded with a perplexing, prophetic announcement, which specified that (1) she was to bear two sons who would be the ancestors of two nation groups, and (2) the older son would serve the younger (Genesis 25:23). The older son, Esau, would become the ancestral father of Edom (see Genesis 36). Jacob would inherit the covenantal promises (which would naturally go to the oldest son) and become one of the patriarchs of the nation of Israel. This announcement set the stage for the story of Jacob’s life.

**The Birth of Esau and Jacob**

Rebekah successfully endured her pregnancy and gave birth to twin boys. Esau, who was born first, was so named because of his red complexion and hairy body. This description symbolizes the development of Esau’s character—a man who would allow himself by his passions down a path of self-satisfaction and who would not value the promises of God. Jacob was born second, “with his hand holding Esau’s heel” (Genesis 25:26)! This foreshadows the rivalry that would exist between the two brothers and the self-reliant efforts Jacob would exert to obtain the birthright and blessings that naturally belonged to the firstborn son. Though divinely chosen by God to inherit the
promises given to Abraham and Isaac, Jacob would dishonor the Lord’s name through his deceit. Neither Esau nor Jacob prove themselves to be worthy of inheriting the promises. However, Jacob ultimately shows himself to be a man who valued the things of God. This goes to show that the fulfillment of God’s promises does not depend upon our merit or goodness.

Let’s not overlook the fact that Rebekah gave birth to her twin boys when Isaac was 60 years old. Married since age 40 and having interceded for his barren wife for years, this shows that Isaac possessed a strong faith. He did not repeat the mistake of his parents, who impatiently sought to fulfill the Lord’s promises through the worldly method of concubinage (Genesis 16).

Jacob Buys the Birthright

“Birthright” (Hebrew brakora) refers to the rights of the firstborn son. Privilege and responsibility accompanied the birthright, for it signified leadership of the family and/or tribe. The firstborn would naturally inherit the majority portion (if not all) of the his father’s possessions and become the leader of the family (see Genesis 25:5; 27:9; Deuteronomy 21:15-17). In addition, the firstborn would assume spiritual leadership of the family. In Abraham’s family, this meant leading the family to walk by faith in the God of the Abrahamic covenant, which was inherited by the holder of the birthright.

In Genesis 25:29-34, we get our first glimpse into the character of Jacob as a schemer when he takes advantage of Esau’s carnality to be able to obtain the birthright. The account tells us that one day Esau, a skilled hunter, returned home from the field exhausted and hungry. When he smelled Jacob’s stew, he demanded, “Let me eat some of that red stew,
for I am exhausted!” (Genesis 25:30). Jacob, salivating at this unexpected opportunity to make a deal, demanded that Esau swear under oath to give him the birthright in exchange for a bowl of lentil stew and some bread (25:31,33). Esau, who cared about nothing except for immediate satisfaction of his hunger, saw no value in retaining the birthright. Consequently, he despised his birthright and sold it to Jacob in exchange for lentil stew.

**The Christian Birthright**

The Book of Hebrew refers to this incident to exhort Christians “to see to it...that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal” (Hebrews 12:16). This negative evaluation clearly tells us that Esau was a man ruled by the flesh. He was a man driven by the instant gratification of his lusts and lived by sight, not by faith. He misplaced his values, for he traded away the future headship of his family and the spiritual inheritance of the Abrahamic covenant for a single lentil meal! Like many today who profess Christ as Lord, Esau considered the things of this world to be more precious than the things of God.

Romans 8:16-17 speaks of the Christian’s birthright: “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” As children of God, our birthright as fellow heirs with Christ is future glorification with Him in the new heavens and earth. The question we must ask ourselves is, “Am I despising my birthright like Esau, savoring the things of this world rather than the things of God? Am I any better than Esau who had no time for spiritual things? Am I seeking to trade the sufferings associated with being a follower of Christ for the comfort of being accepted by the world?”
**God Is Sovereign**

God’s sovereignty stands at the forefront of Jacob’s story. The Lord already knew the plan for his life. From the beginning, we learn that Jacob would inherit the birthright that naturally belonged to the firstborn. Esau showed himself to be a godless man who sought immediate gratification in life. Because Esau did not value his spiritual privileges, he disqualified himself from inheriting the Abrahamic promises. On the other hand, Jacob, the deceiver, valued the promises, but used ungodly tactics to seek the inheritance. He would have to endure years of divine discipline before he’d be ready to take up the mantle passed down from his grandfather, Abraham.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What differed between Isaac’s and Abraham’s approaches to their wife’s barrenness?
2. Read Luke 18:1-8. What persistent problem or issue in your life do you regularly pray about to the Lord? What answer have you received?
3. What was the birthright? Consult a Bible dictionary and the following passages to get additional background: Genesis 25:5; 27:9; Deuteronomy 21:15-17.
4. What does the incident of Esau’s selling his birthright tell you about his character? What does it tell you about Jacob?
5. In what ways might we be tempted to neglect or despise our salvation in Christ?
6. How does it make you feel that God knows how our lives will unfold?
7. In what ways have you had to endure God’s divine discipline? Read Hebrews 12:3-17.