

Genesis 25-36

Overview:

Through the family lines of Adam, Noah, and Abraham, Genesis tells us about God's plans to restore Fallen Humanity. Through the offspring, or seed, of this one family God was working salvation for all families. In this section of Genesis we arrive at the "book of Isaac" or the "generations of Isaac." The book of Genesis is organized around 10 of these "generations of..." sayings. These sayings give us clues about where the story is moving from one major narrative to another. We are leaving the generations of Abraham behind, and picking up with the generations of Isaac.

Isaac, Abraham's son of promise, is now carrying the covenant that God made with his father. Isaac and his offspring are blessed with the promises of the covenant, and Isaac's story now mirrors the story of Abraham in many ways. God's faithfulness is unchanging from generation to generation towards this family, despite its victories or failures. Although this section of Genesis is organized under "the generations of Isaac," the main character who emerges quickly is Isaac's second born son, Jacob.

Jacob's story is a series of wrestling matches, beginning with his birth. Jacob continues to struggle with his father, his brother, and essentially every person he encounters. Despite all of his struggles, Jacob's life is characterized by the presence and promises of God. Jacob, the man of struggle, is promised the blessings of Abraham's covenant. But it is in three encounters with God himself that Jacob's story is ultimately defined.

While Jacob is going into exile, fleeing from his brother, God meets him in a dream. Jacob sees a ladder stretching from heaven to earth. Jacob's sins separated him from his father's household. He is in exile. All of humanity is in exile with Jacob; we are separated from God in our sin. God gives Jacob a glimpse of his plans to reunite heaven and earth through keeping the covenant that he made with Jacob's family. Although Jacob is cast away from his father's house, God reveals his plans to build Jacob's household into a heavenly dwelling place on earth. God has a plan for Jacob in exile and for Mankind in exile.

Years later, as Jacob flees from his father-in-law, God meets with him again. In the night, God comes and wrestles with Jacob. Jacob is wounded by this struggle, but the wounds of struggle have been a part of God's plan all along. While Jacob struggled with others throughout his life, he now sees that it was God who was wrestling him into greater maturity. He walks with a limp from that moment on, but the limp itself is a sign of God's hand on Jacob.

At the place called Bethel ("the house of God") Jacob is visited a third time. In chapter 35, only a few verses before we read about Jacob's death, God blesses Jacob and gives him a new name. Jacob's identity as the wrestler and trickster is changed. He is given the name Israel. Israel has a dual meaning; it can either be read as "God

shall persevere” or as “He perseveres or contends with God.” Both meanings actually reframe Jacob’s life. Jacob’s life is defined by God’s unchanging faithfulness, and God’s persistent contending in Jacob’s circumstances.

Questions for Reflection, Meditation, and Prayer:

- Jacob’s life is a great example of the difference between our limited, human perspective and God’s eternal, divine perspective.
 - Can you think of any circumstances in your life where you need to remember that God sees differently than we do?
 - Pray and invite God’s clarity and peace into these circumstances.
- As you read about Jacob’s story, how does his story fit into the story of the Bible?
 - Think specifically about the other major moments in God’s plan for redemption—e.g. the Exodus, King David, and the life of Jesus.
 - Does anything from Jacob’s life re-emerge in those narratives?
- How do Isaac and Jacob’s stories mirror Abraham’s story? What images or scenes do you see repeated?
 - Why do you think there would be so much repetition in these men’s lives? What could God be trying to teach us through the repetition?
 - Where does the faithfulness of God to keep his promises to this family meet your fears about his faithfulness to keep promise with you?
- Ultimately, Jesus is the greater Jacob. He is the Son of Promise, who was persecuted throughout his life. Jesus was wounded in his side for our sake. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the covenant that God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to bless all the nations of the world. Jesus was himself the meeting place between heaven and earth—he was “Bethel”, the house of God among us. Jesus is the true Israel, who persevered in our place, and whom God wounded in our stead.
 - As you read through these chapters, and listen to sermons on Sunday, let the story of Jacob lead you to worship God for the great gift of Jesus Christ. Ask that God would increase your hunger to meet him in Jesus.

Recommended Resources:

- Genesis 16-50 (WBC) by Gordon Wenham
- Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants by Peter Gentry & Stephen Wellum