

GENESIS 25-32

JACOB & GOD'S FAITHFULNESS AMIDST HUMAN FAILURE

Jacob is an interesting figure in the Genesis story. He stands as a crucial character in the pivot of Genesis: the grandson of Abraham (and listed throughout the Old Testament as one of the patriarchs of Israel), and also the father of the 12 sons who become the 12 tribes (which become the chief designation for God's people going forward). And yet to read his story, one might be confused at how exactly he fits into the story of God. His life in Genesis centers around two major deceitful acts. The Lord draws meaning from the birth of him and his twin brother as he says that these men will represent nations with the younger (Jacob) being stronger and master over the older (Esau) (Genesis 25:19-28). Paul uses this story in Romans 9:6-18 to illustrate God's sovereign choice of individuals—that it is not according to works or foreknowledge, but according to his own gracious desire. The first deceitful act of Jacob comes right after this in 25:26-34 as Jacob convinces Esau to sell him his birthright as Esau comes in exhausted from hunting. The second—and more outwardly clear—example of Jacob's deceitfulness comes in Genesis 27 as Jacob connives with Rebekah, his mother, to receive the blessing from Isaac instead of Esau. Remember in Genesis: the idea of blessing is huge. Isaac ends the blessing with "Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you" (Genesis 27:29). This is nothing less than the blessing of the covenant—and it is now given to Jacob instead of Esau, fulfilling what God said would happen.

How do we understand such acts of deception? What do we think when the promises and blessings pass through someone acting like Jacob? The narrative then covers three stories of God blessing Jacob. This is to show: 1) God's promises continue to the next generation of Abraham's family, 2) his promises cannot be stopped or derailed even in the midst of sin and deceit. In Genesis 28, God comes to Jacob in his dream as he has a vision of a ladder connecting heaven and earth. In 28:13-15 God affirms—you guessed it—the three-fold promise of the Abrahamic covenant: land, multitude of offspring, and blessing. God makes it clear that only he can bridge the gap between heaven and earth to bring blessing—a gap that Jesus says that he definitively bridged in his incarnation to earth (John 1:50-51). Second is the unique story of Jacob wrestling with God in Genesis 32. The wrestling centers on whether the divine figure will bless Jacob or not, with Jacob saying he will not let go until he has received blessing (32:26). It may seem like an odd story—but it is communicating the fact that Jacob now understands: he cannot receive blessing unless it is from the hand of God. Finally, God explicitly blesses Jacob in 35:9-15. Here is again the same promises: blessing from God, a land for his people, and that they will be fruitful and multiply. Not only that, but a new detail is added to the promise: "

A nation and a company of nations shall come from you..." (28:11). What does this mean? Not only will Jacob (Abraham) be the father of a really large nation, but the father of many nations. How? Ultimately through the promised offspring (Jesus), who will save many from the nations and bring them to himself. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be the physical fathers of a large nation (Israel). But even more importantly, they will be the spiritual fathers of a multitude of nations (all new covenant believers). What a blessing this truly is that God told Jacob of!

It is possible as you read this section of Genesis that you have been confused what to do with Jacob. The Jacob narrative is meant to 1) amaze us at how God's promises continue—even in the midst of deceit and unfaithfulness; 2) see how God's promises go to the next generation 3) marvel at the promise that this coming blessing and spiritual kingdom will extend far past the borders of Israel. We will continue to see more and more failure among God's people in the story of Genesis. But what we see even more is God's faithfulness to the covenant. Which is a necessary reminder in the midst of how often we fail—God will never fail.