

A personal Bible study on the birth, life and death of Jacob:

For an Old Testament bible study the life and history of Jacob can but nothing else than to speak to everyone and is to be found in the first book of the Bible, called Genesis. Genesis means 'the beginning' (see *The Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*) and therefore indicates that Jacob is one of the Biblical fathers out of which Israel, and latter Christianity, flows. In short, to study the life of Jacob, and breach the gap of a few thousand years, we have to read ourselves into the shoes of Jacob wherever they fit (for a similar endeavour see the *NIV Life Application Study Bible*). The life of Jacob is in the three clear stages of growth and development, as given to us by the *NIV Study Bible*. These stages are:

1. Jacob at home (25:19—27:46)
2. Jacob abroad (28–30)
3. Jacob at home again (31–35)

Jacob the deceiver lived up to his name, as a boy back at home, by deceiving both his brother and father. Jacob was the picture of someone only interested in enriching his own life. He was the picture of the consumer fattening himself on the behalf of others. Are many of us not in the same shoes by needing and wanting at the expense of others? Is selfishness not at the heart of capitalism, except where God has changed personalities? We only have to look at little children to know selfishness is part of the human nature.

Jacob's selfishness cost him to flee from home when his brother intended to kill him. That took Jacob abroad and into hardship at his uncle Laban. There he had to work under an unfair boss who demanded what he wasn't willing to pay for. Jacob was contracted under harsh terms and conditions, worsened by inhumane weather beatings, for peanuts. This changed Jacob and stripped him of his consumerism and selfishness. In all of this, we read, God was with him and blessed him. Isn't hardship, most often, a blessing and the place where we find God? Isn't that the place where needs and wants, for self, are exchanged for needs and wants for others? Isn't that the place where my money becomes money for others, my time becomes time for others; because the true value of life had at last simmered through? Have you ever stood at an open grave, or a cancer bed, and suddenly realised that there is more to life than what we see?

In the last stage Jacob went back home. On the way back God changed his name to Israel to confirm his personality and attitude change. Only now could he be a real blessing to other people and per

implication all people through Jesus. When reading ourselves into his shoes, are we a blessing to others or rather a burden, or even a curse? The brother he deceived, by stealing his birthright, he now approached in total meekness, expecting and preparing for the worst without dodging his responsibilities of restitution. Dr. Andrew Murray once said “Humility is the beauty of Holiness”. Humility is what empowers us to make right where we have wronged.

Driving it home:

1. Please look at Genesis 25:29-34. Isn't this the picture of the platonic relationships of today where the value of someone is in what he or she can do or give, rather than who he or she is as someone created in the image of God? Esau was Jacobs brother, but actually rather looks like a customer of his deceiving business.
2. In Genesis 27, who do you think was really the culprit in Jacob's stealing of Esau's blessing? Jacob or his mom? If it was his mom, could Jacob have had anything for it that his mom influenced him? Could Jacob have been the victim, rather than the culprit?
3. Jacob worked 14 years for his two wives, as we read in Genesis 29, what was the time between receiving them as wives?
4. Carefully study the testimony of Jacob in Genesis 31:38-42. Would you have stuck it out with a boss like Laban?
5. What was Israel's mood approaching his brother in Genesis 32:1-20 (especially verses 7-12)? Would you have been willing to go through that to restore a broken relationship and so do restitution for wrong you have done?
6. Do you think Israel found peace at the end of his life and died a fulfilled man? Read Genesis 47:30 for a possible answer.
7. What other bible study lessons can you find in this rich testimony of Jacob's life?