

EXCERPTS FROM JACOB

CHAPTER 2 (PP. 29-31)

THE MAN JACOB: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The study of the life and character traits of Jacob, like that of his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac, should be of great importance to every true Christian believer. The reason is because Jacob is one of the great names of history and one of the Bible's most important figures. In fact, he was the third link in God's plan to start a new nation from Abraham. The success of that plan undoubtedly was more often in spite of, than because of his life. The Bible shows that God promised all three of the major patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) that He would make their descendants a great nation and give them the land of Canaan to live in (Genesis 12:1-7; 13:14-16; 15:18; 17:6-8; 26:4; 28:13-15), but it is by Jacob's God-given name "Israel" (Genesis 32:28) that the nation is founded and known. Even before he was born, God had promised that His plan would be worked out through him and not his twin brother Esau (Genesis 25:20-23; cf. Romans 9:10-13). In other words, it was God's sovereign decision that Jacob would become the father of the twelve sons that form the tribes of Israel, and subsequently became the nation of Israel—thus fulfilling God's promise to Abraham that his descendants would be too numerous to count, and that they will become a great nation (Genesis 12:2). [1]

A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Although Jacob unconditionally experienced the favor and faithfulness of God, a quick reading of the Genesis account of his life gives us the impression that he was a person and leader with many short comings and failures. Outwardly, his long life might appear rather domesticated, as he did little more than tend livestock and raised a family. [2] But if we look very closely, "there are two key thoughts that actually opened up his life and threw light on his history. The first was the unhappiness produced by family troubles and polygamy—this is illustrated throughout his entire career. The second was the transforming power of fellowship with God. This truth also shines clearly in all the loftier experiences of this chosen man." [3]

While his life was blessed by God in many ways (he was given spiritual as well as material blessings), it was a life mostly consumed by struggles and tension and also marked by migrations—as had been the case with his ancestors, Abraham and Isaac. His struggles began in the womb with his twin brother Esau, and continued through their contest over the firstborn's birthright and their father's blessings, and culminated in his all-night battle with the angel of the Lord and face-to-face reconciliatory encounter afterward with his brother Esau. In the interim, Jacob spent twenty toil-filled years tending the sheep of his

uncle and father-in-law Laban. These were years during which he later confessed, “heat consumed me by day and frost at night, and sleep was banished from my eyes,” and he was forced to become Laban’s “brother in deception.” Nonetheless, the change of his name from “Jacob” to “Israel” marked the point at which he graduated from a servant of God to God’s child, and from an existence defined by struggles and strife to a harmonious realization of his relationship with God. [4]

ENDNOTES

[1] Excerpted from Ilumina Gold:Parents & Teachers Edition,*Profiles of Biblical Characters: Jacob* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2004).

[2] Ibid, *Encyclopedia: Jacob*.

[3] From the Thompson Chain-Reference Study Bible, New King James Version, *Character Studies: Jacob*.

[4] Kosher Ninja Chick JPA, *What is the Significance of Jacob’s Name Change to Israel? What is the Typology to It?* (<http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index;ylt=Amp4mDZjRudauVBdm92Viz8jzKIX;ylv=3?qid=20081201014043AAvrIkR>).