

THE BEGINNING

FROM JACOB TO ISRAEL

FALL

Lesson 05

OCTOBER 5, 2025

LESSON TEXT

Genesis 25–36

FOCUS VERSES

Genesis 32:27–28

²⁷And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.

²⁸And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

God changed Jacob and called him to be the unlikely leader of the twelve tribes of Israel.

MY RESPONSE TO COVENANT

I will see myself as God sees me.

COVENANT CONTEXT

As we continue deeper into Genesis, we discover God was faithful to His covenant promise to Abraham to bless him with many descendants. Abraham's son Isaac had twin boys, and God invited the younger Jacob to be the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, from whom we'll see God's people quickly multiply.

TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: If you have a brother or sister, what is your funniest story of sibling rivalry?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to set up today's lesson about Jacob and Esau's intense sibling rivalry.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection. (I)

I. JACOB AT WAR WITH ESAU

A. A Struggle from Birth

B. Jacob Stole the Blessing

C. I will never attempt to forcibly take what God has promised to freely give me.

DISCUSS: What problems do you need to submit to God before you make the situation worse than it already is?

II. JACOB AT WAR WITH HIMSELF

- A. Jacob's Retreat
- B. Jacob's Defeat
- C. I will allow God to use my life circumstances to teach me how to follow Him.

DISCUSS: *What lesson(s) does God want to teach you through your current circumstances?*

III. JACOB AT WAR WITH GOD

- A. Jacob's Confession (V)

DISCUSS: *What do you need to confess to God so you can experience His transformation?*

- B. Jacob's Transformation

DISCUSS: *Have you had a life-changing encounter with God? If not, ask God to give you such an experience.*

- C. I will see myself as God sees me.

DISCUSS: *How can you more fully embrace the new identity you have in Christ?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us see ourselves as He sees us
- For God to help us be faithful examples of His transforming power

LESSON CONNECTION

Sibling rivalries can create gripping storylines. We see many examples of siblings who support one another personally and professionally celebrate each other's successes and enjoy lifelong friendships. And then...some siblings just cannot seem to get along, even in the best of circumstances.

Sisters Olivia de Havilland and Joan Fontaine just could not get along. Both were accomplished actresses during the mid-twentieth century, but neither seemed to appreciate her sister's successes. Their rivalry, which was downright nasty at times, seemed to reach back into their childhood. According to the *New York Post*, when de Havilland was in elementary school, she was asked "to write a make-believe last will and testament." De Havilland reportedly wrote: "I bequeath all my beauty to my younger sister, Joan, since she has none." In another incident, the teenage de Havilland broke her younger sister's collarbone during a fight.

In 1942 Fontaine got a taste of revenge when both sisters were nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actress. Much to de Havilland's chagrin, Fontaine won. Four years later, de Havilland won her own Oscar. When her younger sister approached to offer congratulations, de Havilland snubbed her. "I went over to congratulate her as I would have done to any winner," Fontaine wrote. "She took one look at me, ignored my hand, clutched her Oscar and wheeled away."

Sadly the sisters apparently never reconciled their differences. When their mother died in 1975, they even feuded at

the funeral, with de Havilland reportedly attempting to prohibit Fontaine from attending. Four years later, both sisters attended the Oscars ceremony but refused to sit together. In the late 1980s, the two inadvertently booked adjacent rooms at a Beverly Hills hotel. When Fontaine learned her sister was staying next door, she immediately checked out of the hotel (nypost.com).

Fontaine summed up the sisters' fractured relationship in a 1978 interview when she said of de Havilland, "I don't see her at all and I don't intend to," adding, "I got married first, got an Academy Award first, had a child first. If I die, she'll be furious, because again I'll have got there first!" (seattlerep.org).

Thankfully, sibling rivalries featuring this level of vitriol are the exception, not the norm. But when sibling relationships go south, things can get ugly in a hurry. Perhaps it is not surprising that the first recorded murder was between two brothers. Cain ended his brother Abel's life in an apparent jealous rage when God accepted Abel and his sacrifice while rejecting Cain and his sacrifice. Rather than repenting, Cain surrendered to his darkest impulses. This account warns us that sin, such as jealousy and pride—when left unrepented—has disastrous consequences and ruins even the closest relationships.

BIBLE LESSON

I. JACOB AT WAR WITH ESAU

A. A Struggle from Birth

Genesis 25–36 shares the account of a long-running feud between two men, Jacob and Esau. They were Isaac and Rebekah's twin sons, but a birthday was about the only thing these two had in common. The roots of the conflict between Jacob and Esau extended back to their birth, as recorded in Genesis 25:21–26. Their mother, Rebekah, had been unable to bear children until God miraculously intervened. Her pregnancy was more difficult than expected because "the children struggled together within her" (Genesis 25:22). Sensing something unusual was happening in her womb, Rebekah asked God for insight. He told her: "Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23, NKJV).

When Rebekah finally gave birth, Esau arrived first, followed by Jacob. Ominously, Jacob came out of the womb gripping his brother's heel. The name *Jacob*, which literally means "heel grabber," would prove to be a dark part of Jacob he wrestled with much of his life.

B. Jacob Stole the Blessing

Isaac and Rebekah's favoritism intensified the brothers' rivalry. Esau was a skillful hunter, a true outdoorsman, which made him his father's favorite, while Jacob preferred to stay close to home, which endeared him to his mother. Rebekah's preference for Jacob eventually inspired her to concoct a plan to help her youngest son swindle his older brother.

As the firstborn son, Esau was entitled to both the birthright (a double portion of the family inheritance) and his father's blessing (the pronouncement of covenant benefits). Jacob caught Esau in a moment of weakness and convinced him to trade his birthright for a bowl of pottage. Later Rebekah assisted Jacob in an elaborate ruse to trick

Isaac, who was nearly blind from age, into pronouncing the blessing over Jacob rather than over Esau. When Esau discovered his younger brother's trickery, he was furious. His only comfort was the thought he would soon murder Jacob and reclaim what his crafty baby brother had stolen.

C. I will never attempt to forcibly take what God has promised to freely give me.

God had promised Rebekah that her older son would serve the younger (Genesis 25:23), a revelation she no doubt had shared with Jacob. Perhaps Rebekah and Jacob viewed this promise as justification for their manipulative and deceptive tactics against Esau. To use a modern idiom, Rebekah and Jacob apparently believed "the end justifies the means."

When God promises something, He does not need our help to fulfill His word, especially when our idea of "help" includes unethical and immoral actions such as lying and deceit. Rebekah and Jacob took matters into their own hands, resulting in shattered trust and a lonely fugitive escape to a foreign land. It would be years before Jacob could safely return home.

***DISCUSS:** What problems do you need to submit to God before you make the situation worse than it already is?*

II. JACOB AT WAR WITH HIMSELF

Being at war with your sibling is bad, but it's even worse when you are at war with yourself. You may be able to distance yourself from others, but you cannot outrun yourself. As the old saying goes, "No matter where you go, there you are." This was Jacob's problem: he could run from his brother, but he could not outrun his own character flaws. His selfishness that brought him into conflict with Esau would cause him further trouble in the future. Eventually Jacob would need to stop running and confront his personal shortcomings. But that day had not dawned yet; it was still a long way off.

A. Jacob's Retreat

Jacob packed his bags and hit the road, grateful to be temporarily beyond the reach of his brother's wrath. Jacob probably didn't realize it, but God also used the incident to isolate him from his mother's dishonest influence. One night, as he lay alone in the darkness, perhaps thinking fondly of home, God appeared to Jacob in a vision and gave him a promise: "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (Genesis 28:15). Although Jacob felt his life was nearly over, God had him right where He wanted him.

The vision and beautiful promise were only the beginning. God had more lessons to teach Jacob before the promise would be fulfilled. Jacob—the con man, deceiver, trickster, huckster, supplanter—was about to meet his match. His wily uncle Laban, who lived in Padanaram, would soon show his nephew how it felt to be on the receiving end of those dirty tricks.

B. Jacob's Defeat

Jacob found a pleasant surprise in Padanaram: Rachel, his cousin, whom Genesis 29:17 describes as "beautiful and

well favoured.” Jacob was smitten at first sight. He quickly cut a deal with Rachel’s father, Uncle Laban, promising to serve him for seven years for the privilege of marrying his daughter.

Laban no doubt sensed Jacob’s weakness when it came to Rachel, so Laban conned Jacob into first marrying Rachel’s older sister, Leah. In exchange, Laban exacted seven more years of work from his nephew. When it came to Rachel, Jacob proved to be pretty easy prey. He was married to a wife he didn’t love, and the wife he did love proved to be barren. Since the Jews often measured blessings by children and land, Rachel appeared to be more cursed than blessed.

The frustrations of infertility led to conflict in Jacob and Rachel’s marriage (Genesis 30:1–2). Leah was bearing him children, but Rachel was not, so Rachel sent her handmaid to be a surrogate mother for her. Leah followed her sister’s lead, and they fought for Jacob’s love and affection. His wives and father-in-law were cunning manipulators, and Jacob found himself tangled in webs of family deceit. Eventually Jacob outfoxed his father-in-law and skipped town with his wives, children, and a large portion of Laban’s personal wealth. Once again, Jacob was on the run.

C. I will allow God to use my life circumstances to teach me how to follow Him.

Jacob did not realize it, but God was using these less-than-pleasant circumstances to teach him valuable lessons. Most importantly, Jacob learned that schemes and manipulation may seem to help you get ahead in the short term, but only God can give you blessings that truly satisfy. Following Rachel’s desperate pleading, God answered their prayers and gave the couple a son (Genesis 30:22–24). They named their miracle baby Joseph, and he was his father’s favorite child. Jacob was the target of sibling rivalry due to favoritism, and he was perpetuating that same feuding in his own sons.

God does not need our help. He asks for our faith, but He doesn’t need us to speed Him up (like Abraham tried) or to trick and deceive (like Jacob tried). Part of walking by faith is trusting that God knows what He’s doing, even when we don’t, and that He will keep His word in His time. As we live in covenant with God, trust God. The one who made you a promise will keep His promise because He is our covenant-making, covenant-keeping God.

***DISCUSS:** What lesson(s) does God want to teach you through your current circumstances?*

III. JACOB AT WAR WITH GOD

Although God had blessed Jacob in Padanaram, Jacob still had important lessons to learn. True to form, Jacob “stole away” while Laban was distracted by the task of shearing sheep. When Laban learned of his son-in-law’s departure, Laban pursued and overtook Jacob in the mountains. Even then, God shielded Jacob from Laban’s rage. The two men entered an uneasy truce, with Jacob pledging to care for Laban’s daughters while Laban agreed not to harm his son-in-law.

A. Jacob’s Confession

Jacob had gotten Laban off his back, but God was not done settling accounts with this crafty shepherd. God had pronounced His intention to bless Jacob, but Jacob needed to come clean about his personal failures first. On the eve of his reunion with Esau, Jacob seemed to recognize that much of the trouble he had endured during the previous

decades was a result of his own sinfulness. Even so, God had kept the promises He made to Jacob at Bethel. Jacob cried out to God, acknowledging: “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant” (Genesis 32:10).

That night God engaged Jacob in a divine wrestling match on the banks of the Jabbok River. This night would change his life and align him with the covenant God had made his father, Isaac, and his grandfather Abraham. Jacob demanded a blessing from God, and God responded with an unusual question: “What is thy name?” Jacob responded with an honest admission: My name is Jacob. Since Hebrew names were often assigned because of their meanings, when Jacob told his name, he also told of his nature: con man, deceiver, trickster, huckster, supplanter.

DISCUSS: *What do you need to confess to God so you can experience His transformation?*

B. Jacob’s Transformation

God’s response to Jacob’s honesty transformed history. “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed” (Genesis 32:28). No longer would Jacob be known as a conniving schemer who cheated others to get ahead. Now he was Israel, the patriarch of God’s chosen people, a man invited into covenant relationship with God and His people by God’s grace.

As Jacob reflected on this encounter with God beside the Jabbok, he no doubt remembered how his grandfather, Abraham, who had been given the name Abram at birth, had entered a covenant with God. When Abram was ninety-nine years old, God changed his name to Abraham (meaning “father of many nations”), a sign God would fulfill His previous promise to give Abram a son. (See Genesis 17.) Isaac, Jacob’s father, had been that promised son and the heir of Abraham’s covenant with God. Isaac had also been promised many descendants as part of God’s covenant (Genesis 26:24). Like his grandfather and father before him, Jacob could now claim his own life-transforming encounter with God.

DISCUSS: *Have you had a life-changing encounter with God? If not, ask God to give you such an experience.*

C. I will see myself as God sees me.

In time, the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob produced the Messiah: Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1). Jesus was the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through the patriarch (Genesis 22:18). We have the privilege of entering into covenant with Jesus through the blood He shed for us at Calvary (Hebrews 13:20). He graciously gives us a new name—His name—when we are baptized, and He empowers us with new life through His Holy Spirit.

Because of Jesus, our sin and accompanying shame are erased and replaced with hope for today and the promise of an even greater tomorrow. As we embrace and live out what God’s Word says about us, we will recognize we are sons and daughters of the King of kings—royal children who have power with God. We are no longer who we were; by God’s grace, we are living to be who our Creator created us to be.

DISCUSS: *How can you more fully embrace the new identity you have in Christ?*

Teacher Option: *Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how God recreates us when we are in covenant relationship with Him.*

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

You may be familiar with the marketing term *rebranding*, a strategy the *Oxford Dictionary* defines as “the act of changing the way that an organization, business, company, or product appears to the public.” Many companies have undergone rebrands, including several iconic brands. A few years ago, Dunkin’ Donuts dropped the second half of the company’s name and is now known only as “Dunkin’,” a nod to the fact the fast-food chain sells more than donuts. More dramatically, billionaire Elon Musk purchased the popular social media platform Twitter in late 2022 and soon renamed the company “X,” a decision that left many marketers scratching their heads.

Sometimes celebrities or high-profile business leaders attempt to create a new image for themselves. One of the most famous examples is Alfred Bernhard Nobel, the Swedish chemist who invented dynamite and made a fortune selling explosives and military armaments. According to popular history, Nobel experienced an epiphany of sorts when his brother, Ludwig, died in France. A French newspaper erroneously believed Alfred had died, and they published an unflattering obituary that labeled the munitions magnate as a “merchant of death.” A biographer wrote that Nobel “became so obsessed with the posthumous reputation that he rewrote his last will, bequeathing most of his fortune to a cause upon which no future obituary writer would be able to cast aspersions.” That cause was the Nobel Foundation, which awards annual prizes to scientists, authors, activists, and others who, in the words of Nobel, “shall have conferred the greatest benefit on mankind” during the preceding year ([history.com](https://www.history.com)). Intentional or not, Nobel’s rebranding effort worked. More than a century after his death, his name is most closely associated with the famed Nobel Prize.

Thankfully you do not need a large fortune or an army of marketing experts to undergo a successful “rebrand.” You also don’t need a tummy tuck, facelift, new wardrobe, or even a new name. (Have you noticed that celebrities who change their names often fail to change their behavior?) Real change begins on the inside as God shines His light on the darkest chambers of our hearts.

Paul celebrated this change when he wrote: “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (II Corinthians 5:17). When we embrace God and His Word and we respond to His invitation to live in covenant with Him, He gives us a new name, a new identity, and a new community. Through Him we inherit new and better promises (Hebrews 6:12). Others may not understand what has happened to us, but as we embrace our new identity, they will recognize God is working in us, and many will respond by seeking Him.