



Scriptures: Genesis 25-32

Main Ideas: 1. God can use you despite your past. 2. God can transform messy people into chosen leaders.

[This series is designed to be used in any order, and the intro is the same during each week with a focus of the importance of reading the Old Testament as a whole each week. If you prefer, you can do this just during the first lesson, or stretch this into its own lesson depending on the amount of time you typically have for teaching.]

Intro:

Hey students, welcome back to our series called “Old People.” This is not a teaching series about your grandparents, it’s about people from the Old Testament who were so ancient they’d make your grandparents look young. These “Old People” were used by God to change the world, often despite their own bad decisions.

Throughout this series, we’ll dive deep into the lives of four different “Old People.” We’ll learn their stories and, more importantly, we’ll learn what we can apply to our own lives today.

Let’s pray before we get into it! [Pray.]

Before we jump into Jacob’s story, let’s quickly remind ourselves why studying the Old Testament is important.

Why the Old Testament Matters

Many people think the Old Testament is just a bunch of ancient stories that don’t really matter today. But here’s the truth: the Old Testament is one big story leading up to Jesus.

It’s like a puzzle. If you only look at the New Testament, you only have part of the picture. But when you study the Old Testament, you start to see how everything connects; how God’s plan for salvation was in motion long before Jesus was born.

The people in the Old Testament weren't perfect. In fact, many of them were deeply flawed—just like us. But God still used them to accomplish His plans. And that's exactly what we see in Jacob's story.

[At this point, unless you want to make this idea into its own introductory lesson, go over the Old Testament overview slides. If this is not your first week in the series, feel free to remove words from the recap slide and let students fill in the blanks to make it more interactive.]

Introduction: Setting the Stage

Tonight, we're diving into the life of Jacob. And let me tell you, Jacob's life was straight out of a soap opera. Seriously, if there was an ancient reality show called *Survivor: Ancient Israel*, Jacob would be one of the main contestants. His story is full of family drama, trickery, running for his life, romance, wrestling matches, and a transformation that only God could bring about.

[Ask students if they have ever had drama with a sibling... and if you're brave – let them share a snippet.]

Main Point: Jacob Was a Trickster, But God Still Used Him

Let's start at the very beginning of Jacob's life. His story is found in Genesis 25-33, and it starts with a family feud before he was even born.

Jacob was a twin, and his brother's name was Esau. Even before they were born, they fought in their mother's womb. That's right, these two literally wrestled before they even took their first breath! When their mother, Rebekah, talked to God about her sons, (as any good mother does) God told her that the two boys would become two nations and that the older one (Esau) would serve the younger one (Jacob). This was unusual in their culture because normally, the oldest son was the one who inherited everything and was seen as the leader of the family.

[Feel free to make a joke about sibling order here.]

When the twins were finally born, Esau came out first, but Jacob grabbed onto his heel, as if he was trying to pull Esau back in so he could be first! That's where Jacob's name comes from—it literally means "heel-grabber" or "deceiver." And let me tell you, Jacob lived up to his name for a good chunk of his life.

Jacob the Trickster: Stealing the Birthright

Now, let's fast forward a bit. Esau grew up to be a hunter, a tough outdoorsy kind of guy. Jacob, on the other hand, was more of a homebody; he liked to stay inside and cook.

One day, Esau came home hungry after a long day of hunting. Jacob had just made some delicious stew, and Esau begged for some. Instead of just sharing like a normal brother, Jacob saw an opportunity.

Let's turn to Genesis 25:29-34 NIV to see how this unfolds.

²⁹ Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. ³⁰ He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.^[1])

³¹ Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright."

³² "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?"

³³ But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.

³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left.

So Esau despised his birthright.

Now, in those days, a birthright was a **big deal**. The firstborn son got a double portion of the inheritance and was seen as the leader of the family after the father died. But Esau, being impulsive and short-sighted, said, "**Look, I'm about to die! What good is a birthright to me?**" (Genesis 25:32)

So, Esau traded his birthright for a bowl of soup.

Now, was Jacob wrong for taking advantage of Esau? Yes. But Esau was also wrong because he didn't value what God had given him. This was a warning sign about Esau's character. He cared more about temporary things than about God's bigger plan.

[You can ask here if anyone has ever made a deal with a friend or sibling that they have regretted later – or been tricked into.]



[These questions can be used in either a small group or large group setting, and feel free to prune these questions as needed to fit your specific group best.]

- How does Josiah's early reign and commitment to God (2 Kings 22:1-2) challenge us to follow God wholeheartedly, regardless of the spiritual condition of those around us?
- When Josiah heard the Book of the Law being read (2 Kings 22:8-13), he was deeply moved and tore his clothes in repentance. What does this teach us about the impact of God's Word on our lives, and how should we respond to it?
- Josiah led a national revival by purging Judah of idols and restoring proper worship (2 Kings 23:4-20). What does this tell us about the importance of removing spiritual distractions and staying faithful to God in our own lives?
- Despite his young age, Josiah took a bold stand against the idolatry and sin that had plagued Judah. How does his example challenge us to make bold choices for God, even when we're young or face opposition?
- Josiah's reforms affected the whole nation. How can we as individuals make a positive impact on our communities or even our nation, as Josiah did with his people?
- In 2 Kings 23:21-23, Josiah reinstated the Passover celebration. Why was this act significant for the people of Judah, and what can we learn from it about the importance of remembering and honoring God's work in our lives?
- After Josiah's death, the people quickly turned away from God (2 Kings 23:36-37). What does this reveal about the human tendency to fall away from faith, and how can we prevent this from happening in our own lives?
- Josiah sought God's guidance through the prophetess Huldah when he found the Law (2 Kings 22:14-20). How does this demonstrate the importance of seeking godly counsel and listening to God's voice through His Word and His servants?

- Josiah's story is marked by reform and renewal, but it ended tragically when he was killed in battle (2 Kings 23:29-30). How does this remind us that, even when we follow God faithfully, we may still face challenges and hardship?
- Josiah's legacy of faithfulness is remembered despite his early death (2 Kings 23:25). How does this encourage us to live faithfully, knowing that our actions can leave a lasting impact, even if we don't see the full results during our lifetime?

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