

What we are after

This week we begin our study of the life of Jacob. As we look at his life as a whole, a major theme easily arises: God's relentless grace. Time and again we will see God persevere and pursue Jacob in grace; time and again we will watch as grace catches hold of Jacob and keeps on transforming him. That is a message we can all embrace.

As we begin, we are going to dive in with both feet into the story of Jacob. The weekly devotional guide will help any of those who are interested in filling in some of the background to the account of Jacob's life, but we will begin our discussions with his birth and an early defining moment.

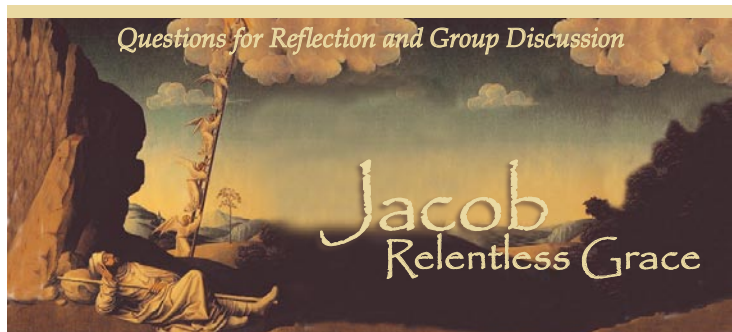
What is in view in these earlier pages of Jacob's story? Perhaps we can put it simply this way: God is working, sovereignly in His grace, to keep His promises in spite of what people might do.

Talking to your group

As you begin your discussion with your group, you will have to be aware that any discussion of God's sovereignty and the certainty of His plans may well raise questions about election, free will, predestination, and the like. That is to be expected. But, you will (probably!) not be able to resolve all those issues in an evening's discussion.

It's not that such issues are not important; they are. But although it is important to wrestle with what and why we think about God's sovereignty in human affairs, we might not be able to resolve all our questions and calm all our apprehensions about what is left up in the air when the discussion is over. What we do want to see, from these early snapshots of Jacob's life, is that God's plan and promise are

Ultimately the story of what God is doing in the world is told through the life of Abraham and his descendants. But not all of Abraham's descendants come fully into view. The promises are traced, first through one, then another. And the author of Genesis is intent on following the "line of the promise."




southside
FELLOWSHIP

clearly never in jeopardy.

Isaac is Abraham's son of promise; the one God said would be Abraham's heir and the one through whom God's promise of blessing for the nations would come. When it turns out that Rebekah, his wife, is barren (like Sarah had been at first), we are confronted with an obstacle to that plan and promise. Rebekah's barrenness would certainly seem to be an obstacle to God's designs. But Isaac prays (and then waits 20 years!), and has a son. The plan and purpose of God go forward.

But the son born is one of a pair of twins. And from the start, God informs the new parents that the sons will father two "peoples" and that those people will be opposed to one another. In addition, contrary to the custom of the day, God informs Isaac and Rebekah that the "older will serve the younger." That's not typically how family line ran in those days. As this plays out in their lives, we watch Esau (the older) look lightly on his birthright (even before it had officially been granted) and we watch Jacob connive and scheme to get what he wants. One looks lightly at what God is offering; the other takes matters into his own hands. Even though we only have a brief snapshot or two, this is not a picture of holy family life and noble godly men!

So why give us these details? Perhaps the truth we need to see is simple . . . even if it doesn't answer all our questions. The "star" of this story is not Jacob or Rebekah or Isaac. Although they are all players in the story that is unfolding, it is God Himself who is the star. What that means is that although what we read is about what is going on in the lives of the people, what really is in view is how God is working out His good purpose and plan . . . in spite of what may seem to be natural obstacles (Rebekah's barrenness) and relational hurdles (the troubling characteristics of both of Isaac's sons).

How can we take this home?

As has been mentioned, this account cannot answer all our questions about God's sovereignty and human freedom or about the way God assures His plans will be carried out. But they do picture for us the reality that He will get what He is after in the end. It's a great picture of grace and goodness and wisdom procuring for God what is needed for the fulfillment of His promises. We need to hear that. In the midst of the seeming obstacles we face—whether natural or relational—we need to know that God's plans for us are sure and certain.

"We are left with no doubt that the writer saw in this story of Jacob's trickery a larger lesson; that Esau, though he had the right of the firstborn, did not value it over a small bowl of soup. Thus, when in God's plan Esau lost his birthright and consequently his blessing, there was no injustice dealt him. The narrative has shown that he did not want the birthright." John H. Sailhammer

Thinking . . .

We all plan—for business trips, family vacations, home repairs, weddings, and more. What kinds of things get in the way of you realizing your plans?

Do you think God ever struggles with the same kinds of things? Do things get in the way of His plans? Why or why not?

Reflecting . . .

We're diving into the life of Jacob, the grandson of Abraham. Read about his birth in Genesis 25:19-34.

What are the implications of Rebekah's barrenness for Isaac? For God's plans?

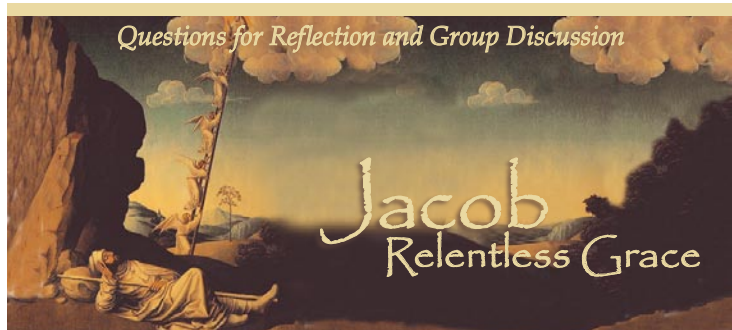
What are the implications of the answer God gives Rebekah in response to her request for insight?

As you may recall from our study of the life of Abraham, God made certain specific promises to Abraham and his descendants. He clarified that these promises would be fulfilled through his son Isaac (and not Ishmael, who was born to Abraham through Hagar). Given this background to this account, what is being underscored in recounting these details about Jacob's life?

Responding . . .

Paying attention to the story being unfolded before us (about God's promises to and through Abraham to bless the whole world), what do these earlier moments of Jacob's life underscore for us?

Ultimately the story of what God is doing in the world is told through the life of Abraham and his descendants. But not all of Abraham's descendants come fully into view. The promises are traced, first through one, then another. And the author of Genesis is intent on following the "line of the promise."

*Thinking . . .*

We all plan—for business trips, family vacations, home repairs, weddings, and more. What kinds of things get in the way of you realizing your plans?

Do you think God ever struggles with the same kinds of things? Do things get in the way of His plans? Why or why not?

Reflecting . . .

We're diving into the life of Jacob, the grandson of Abraham. Read about his birth in Genesis 25:19-34.

What are the implications of Rebekah's barrenness for Isaac? For God's plans?

What are the implications of the answer God gives Rebekah in response to her request for insight?

As you may recall from our study of the life of Abraham, God made certain specific promises to Abraham and his descendants. He clarified that these promises would be fulfilled through his son Isaac (and not Ishmael, who was born to Abraham through Hagar). Given this background to this account, what is being underscored in recounting these details about Jacob's life?

Responding . . .

Paying attention to the story being unfolded before us (about God's promises to and through Abraham to bless the whole world), what do these earlier moments of Jacob's life underscore for us?

Ultimately the story of what God is doing in the world is told through the life of Abraham and his descendants. But not all of Abraham's descendants come fully into view. The promises are traced, first through one, then another. And the author of Genesis is intent on following the "line of the promise."

