

DIGGING DEEPER
IN THE BIBLE SERIES



THE LINEAGE OF JACOB



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The Lineage of Jacob and His Family Tree

By Donna Snow

Who was this man who had a wrestling match with God? We love genealogy because it's fascinating to understand who we descended from. Lineage is key in Scripture. A study of the lineage of Jacob leads us to the twelve tribes of Israel.

What is one of the most astounding facts about the lineage of Jacob? Following Jacob's family tree through the generations eventually reveals the genealogy of Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

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Who was Jacob?

Jacob's name first appears in the Old Testament book of Genesis. Jacob was the grandson of Abraham and the son of Isaac. The lineage of Jacob is part of Israel's illustrious line of patriarchs. Jacob was born in Canaan, which later became the nation of Israel and God's Promised Land to His people.

Jacob was the second son of Isaac and Rebekah. The beginning of Jacob's life is recorded in Genesis 25:26: "*Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob.*" Jacob was a twin, born in birth order moments after his older brother Esau.

The name Jacob means "*he takes by the heel*" or "*he cheats.*" It foreshadowed the life-altering, intense rivalry that would grow between Jacob and Esau.



Overview of Jacob's Life

The lineage of Jacob is one of the most riveting in [biblical history](#). Pivotal moments include rivalry, favoritism, deceit, transformation, forgiveness, and redemption. It's an epic journey all the way to Jesus' birth centuries later. Let's dive in.

Jacob's Favoritism and Sibling Rivalry

As siblings Jacob and Esau grew older, their differences became evident. Esau was a rugged outdoorsman and skilled hunter while Jacob was more of a quiet homebody (Genesis 25:27).

Favoritism entered the scene in one devastating sentence: "*Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob*" (Genesis 25:28). Favoritism is a deadly poison in any situation, but especially in families.

One day, Esau returned from hunting exhausted and asked Jacob for some of his stew. Jacob said he would give his brother stew only if Esau sold Jacob his birthright. (A firstborn son received a double portion of his father's inheritance as a birthright.) Esau agreed and gave his birthright to Jacob (Genesis 25:29-34).

Later, when their father Isaac became old and was about to die, Rebekah conspired with Jacob to steal Isaac's blessing from Esau. It's easy to see why Jacob's name means "he cheats," right?

Fearing retaliation from Esau, Jacob fled from home to seek refuge with his maternal uncle Laban. Before Jacob's departure, Isaac blessed Jacob with God's promise to be fruitful and multiply. He instructed Jacob to look for a wife among Laban's daughters rather than the Canaanite women (Genesis 28:1-4).

Jacob's Marriage and Fatherhood

A significant turning point in the lineage of Jacob and his life happened during his journey to the distant land of Haran where his uncle Laban lived.

One night near Bethel, Jacob had a dream where he saw the angels of God ascending and descending a ladder to heaven. God said to him: "*I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring*" (Genesis 28:13).

God revealed the lineage of Jacob and his offspring would be blessed and become a great nation in the land of Canaan (Genesis 28:13-17). It would be a long time before God's plan became a reality, but God left Jacob with this beautiful promise: "*Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go*" (Genesis 28:15).



1. Jacob's Marriages to Leah and Rachel

When Jacob reached his uncle Laban's home, he fell head over heels in love with Laban's youngest daughter Rachel. Jacob offered to work for Laban for seven years to secure a marriage with Rachel.

After seven years, the wedding took place. However, Laban switched his older daughter Leah for Rachel on their wedding night without Jacob's knowledge. Although he was furious at Laban's underhanded trick, Jacob's love for Rachel had not diminished.

Jacob promised to work for Laban for another seven years to win Rachel's hand in marriage (Genesis 29:21-30). It took perseverance to marry the only woman Jacob truly loved, but the deal was struck. After working for Laban for fourteen years, Jacob finally got to marry his beloved Rachel.

Through this period of love, betrayal, and perseverance, God significantly transformed Jacob. The lineage of Jacob is blessed with many sons (Genesis 29-30). At the proper time, Jacob finally took his family and livestock and left Laban.

2. Jacob Wrestles with God

One night along the journey, Jacob wrestled with God (Genesis 32:22-32) and then was reconciled to his twin brother Esau (Genesis 33). God continued to bless Jacob and gave him a new name: Israel (Genesis 35:9-15).

3. Jacob's Children

God made the lineage of Jacob fruitful and blessed him with twelve sons and one daughter (Genesis 29-30). Through his wives and their maidservants, here are Jacob's children arranged by their birth mothers:

- **Rachel:** Joseph and Benjamin
- **Bilhah:** (Rachel's maidservant): Dan and Naphtali
- **Leah:** Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and daughter Dinah
- **Zilpah:** (Leah's maidservant): Gad and Asher

Each son of Jacob became their own tribe for the new nation of Israel.

Twelve Tribes of Israel

Just as God promised, the lineage of Jacob multiplied greatly to form God's chosen people. Their lineage stretches to this very day.

Jacob's sons each held a specific destiny from God as the twelve tribes of Israel. Before Jacob's death, Jacob blessed each of his sons according to God's instructions.



1. Reuben

Reuben means "behold, a son" and his symbol of blessing means reckless. Jacob's blessing to Reuben from God:

"Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. Unstable as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it—he went up to my couch!" ([Genesis 49:3-4](#))

2, 3. Simeon and Levi

Simeon means "hearing" and Levi means "attachment." Simeon's and Levi's symbols of blessing both mean violence. Jacob's blessings to Simeon and Levi from God:

"Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. Let my soul come not into their council; O my glory, be not joined to their company. For in their anger they killed men, and in their willfulness they hamstrung oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel" (Genesis 49:5-7).

4. Judah

Judah means "praise" and his symbol of blessing is a lion. Jacob's blessing to Judah from God:

"Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk" (Genesis 49:8-12).

5. Zebulun

Zebulun means "abode" and his symbol of blessing is a ship. Jacob's blessing to Zebulun from God:

"Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea; he shall become a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Sidon" (Genesis 49:13).

6. Issachar

Issachar means "reward" and his symbol of blessing is a donkey. Jacob's blessing to Issachar from God:



"Issachar is a strong donkey, crouching between the sheepfolds. He saw that a resting place was good, and that the land was pleasant, so he bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant at forced labor" (Genesis 49:14-15).

7. Dan

Dan means "judgment" and his symbol of blessing is a serpent. Jacob's blessing to Dan from God:

"Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that his rider falls backward. I wait for your salvation, O Lord." (Genesis 49:16-18).

8. Gad

Gad means "good fortune" and his symbol of blessing is a raider. Jacob's blessing to Gad from God: *"Raiders shall raid Gad, but he shall raid at their heels"* (Genesis 49:19).

9. Asher

Asher means "happy" and his symbol of blessing is rich food. Jacob's blessing to Asher from God: *"Asher's food shall be rich, and he shall yield royal delicacies"* (Genesis 49:20).

10. Naphtali

Naphtali means "wrestle" and his symbol of blessing is a doe. Jacob's blessing to Naphtali from God: *"Naphtali is a doe let loose that bears beautiful fawns"* (Genesis 49:21).

11. Joseph

Joseph means "may he add" and his symbol of blessing means fruitful. He did not become a named tribe of Israel. His two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, became two half-tribes (comprising one tribe) as a double blessing to Joseph. Jacob's blessing to Joseph from God:

"Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall. The archers bitterly attacked him, shot at him, and harassed him severely, yet his bow remained unmoved; his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), by the God of your father who will help you, by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that crouches beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father are mighty beyond the blessings of my parents, up to the bounties of the everlasting hills. May they be on the head of Joseph, and on the brow of him who was set apart from his brothers" (Genesis 49:22-26).

*See [*Meant for Good*](#), an in-depth Bible study that I wrote of the life of Joseph which contains all of this and much more.



12. Benjamin

Benjamin means "son of the right hand" and his symbol of blessing is a wolf. Jacob's blessing to Benjamin from God: "*Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey and at evening dividing the spoil*" (Genesis 49:27).

As for these blessings, Scripture tells us: "*All these are the twelve tribes of Israel. This is what their father said to them as he blessed them, blessing each with the blessing suitable to him*" (Genesis 49:28).

Jacob's blessings were prophetic over his sons' lives, as well as those of his two grandsons Manasseh and Ephraim. God's blessings over you and me as His children are just as powerful, personal, and prophetic.

The Lineage of Jesus

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was prophesied and came through the tribe of Judah (Matthew 1:1-17, Luke 3:23-38, Genesis 49:10, and Isaiah 11:1). Jesus is called the "Son of David" on a number of occasions throughout the Gospels. King David was born from Judah's tribe.

God had promised David, the first rightful king of Israel, that his throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:12-13). This caused the people to long to see David's greater son, Jesus the Messiah, who would rule forever.

As a descendant of Jacob's line, Jesus was also rightfully called by Pilate "the king of the Jews" even though Pilate likely did not know that fact.

The Rest of Jacob's Life

Jacob showed favoritism to Joseph as the firstborn son of his beloved Rachel. Unfortunately, Jacob did not learn the collateral damage that favoritism can cause in a family based on his own history with his twin brother Esau.

Jacob's ten older sons hated Joseph and sold him into slavery (Genesis 37). He ended up in Egypt. After thirteen years as a slave and prisoner, God elevated Joseph to Prime Minister of the land of Egypt. The famine brings Joseph's brothers to Egypt to buy food and the family is eventually reconciled (Genesis 39-45).

Joseph moves his entire family from Canaan to Egypt to settle in the lush area of Goshen (Genesis 46-47). Jacob lived in Egypt for seventeen years before dying at the age of 147. Following a period of mourning, Joseph and his brothers buried Jacob's body in the land of Canaan, according to his wishes (Genesis 48-50).



What an extraordinary man and extraordinary story! May God bless your extraordinary life in the Lord, as well.



REFERENCES

See Donna's original Artesian Ministries blog post with hyperlink cites at:

<https://www.artesianministries.org/bible-study/the-lineage-of-jacob-in-the-bible/> .

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