

Jacob's Ladder
7/20 [Genesis 28:10-19a](#)

- Jacob – descendent of Isaac and Abraham.
- Jacob – 2nd son of Isaac who should not be the one to carry on the family name.
- Jacob – the name means 'heel-grabber', trickster, deceiver.

For all intents and purposes, Jacob appears to be the scoundrel of the family. Yet God calls Jacob. Perhaps we need to go back a little bit to see what brought Jacob to the point of his vision now commonly known as 'Jacob's Ladder'.

Esau and Jacob were twin sons of Isaac and Rebecca. Isaac was Abraham's only son. God had for-warned Rebecca that her sons would be as 2 nations divided.

Hebrew names are given to children with a purpose or a specific meaning. Esau, born first, was hairy and red-haired, hence he was named Esau which means 'hairy'. Jacob was born right after Esau and was clutching Esau's heel as he was born, hence he was given the name Jacob which means 'heel-grabber'. But Jacob also means deceiver or trickster.

The Bible continues to describe the boys' relationship as they grow. Esau is the outdoorsman, the hunter. Isaac his father loves wild game, hence Esau becomes Dad's favorite. Jacob is more of a tent-dweller, a home body. Rebecca loves Jacob. Here from the very beginning we have a house divided. Dad likes Esau – Mom likes Jacob. It's not hard to see the conflict that will eventually come to a head.

As the scripture reveals, one day Esau returns from one of his many hunting trips and is literally famished. Jacob had just finished preparing a savory stew. When Esau asks for some stew, Jacob the trickster sees an opportunity. Jacob strikes a bargain with Esau – a bowl of stew for his birthright. In Genesis 25:32, Esau says, "Look, I am about to die, what good is a birthright to me?" So Esau swore an oath and casually gave up his birthright – his inheritance. That must have been some stew!

Esau seemed to have little care for his role as eldest son. He also had no interest in keeping God's covenant. The likely hero of the story has no concern for fulfilling his role as heir to his

family's fortune and ultimately serving a role as part of the lineage to Christ. When this becomes evident, God begins to work on the unlikely hero – the trickster Jacob. There was a movie out some time ago called “Executive Decision”. Steven Segal, the obvious hero, tough guy is slated to lead a rescue team to save over 400 passengers on a hijacked plane. Within 20 minutes of the movie, our hero is literally blown out of a hatch and killed. The audience was expecting our hero to go in guns blazing and take down the bad guys, but that task is left to the unlikely heroes who assume the role to do whatever it takes to save the day.

Jacob, for all intents and purposes, fulfills the role depicted by his name – not your average hero. He is conniving, deceitful, and self-serving. Not your model Christian, is he? As the story continues, Isaac attempts one more time to bestow his blessing on Esau in an effort to set things right – the eldest son should be heir. Isaac asks Esau to use his hunting and culinary skills to bring fresh game prepared the way Isaac likes it. Once done, Isaac tells Esau

he will provide Esau with the blessing, which in our day is similar to a last will and testament.

Isaac thought he would die soon although he ended up living another 40 years. His eyesight was failing. In steps the deceiver Jacob. At his mother's urging (remember Mom likes Jacob), Jacob kills 2 goats and Rebecca prepares them the way Isaac likes his food. To ensure success for the deceit, Jacob covers his smooth skin with goat fur to appear hairy like his brother Esau. He puts on his brother's clothes and manages to cheat Esau a second time. This was probably not Jacob's finest hour. By the time Esau returns Jacob had already received his father's blessing.

At this point in the story, it would appear that Jacob had it all – riches, livestock, the family name. He was on top of the world. Yet when we come to our scripture lesson, Jacob had left his home fleeing for his life. Esau had promised to kill his brother Jacob, and Jacob had no doubt that Esau would do just that. Within a short time Jacob went from having everything to a life on the run. But God had a purpose for Jacob.

One of my great appreciations for the scriptures is the fact that both the good and bad sides of significant characters are displayed. We have often heard how inaccurate history can be because is it presented to us from the point of view of those telling the story. Details sometimes get edited or slanted to a particular way of thinking. Often what we here in the news is far from the truth. Details can be concealed and stories tainted depending on which color eyeglasses the teller wants us to wear. We have seen it with CEO's of companies that are suddenly indicted for theft and fraud. The records revealed a financially healthy company, but the truth was another matter entirely. So the Bible doesn't rose-color Jacob at all. He was quite the scoundrel. But God had a purpose for Jacob.

So we finally arrive at the passage of scripture read for us from the book of Genesis. Jacob is fleeing to his uncle's home for 2 reasons: 1 was simply to save his skin, the second was to take a wife. Once Isaac has accepted that Jacob was to be heir, he instructs Jacob not to take a Canaanite woman to be his wife in

order to honor God's covenant. Esau did not hold much regard for the covenant and had already taken 2 Canaanite women to be his wives. So Jacob was sent to find an acceptable wife. The journey to Haran would take 2 days, so at sunset on the first day Jacob stopped for the night.

I imagine Jacob was doing a little soul-searching. I'm sure we have all done or said things we wish we hadn't. Some of us have had to learn the hard way from our mistakes. So did Jacob. Perhaps he was rethinking recent events – maybe he was feeling the pangs of guilt. Thoughts must have been racing through Jacob's head that first night in the wilderness – all alone, troubled, guilt-ridden. Yet Jacob was able to take a stone for a pillow and somehow fall asleep. That seems like the work of God for sure. I'm thinking a lot of us would have had trouble sleeping on a pillow top mattress with a fluffy feather pillow! Yet Jacob put his head down on a stone and fell asleep. God had a purpose for Jacob.

We come to the heart of the story. Jacob dreams of a ladder or stairway reaching from heaven to earth with angels going up and down the ladder. Angels from heaven were linked to earth by a ladder, and above the ladder stood the Lord God. I imagine Jacob may have been a bit disturbed by all this. It would be the part in the dream where you suddenly wake up from either fear or confusion or just sheer awe. But Jacob, still resting with his head on a stone, continues to experience the dream. God bestows a blessing on Jacob – the blessing of abundance and the promise of a partnership with God. Jacob the trickster was being called to follow God and be a part of the lineage of Christ.

God doesn't call the perfect – he perfects the called. Just as God had a purpose for Jacob, God has a purpose for each of us. God has a purpose for Mount Tabor. Some of us may feel as if we have done so many things wrong in our lives there is no hope for us. Some of us may feel no matter how hard we try nothing goes as it should and there's no point in trying any more. Some of us may feel that God has abandoned us in our hour of need. But God

has a purpose for each of us, and God has a purpose for this congregation. Together we can discern that purpose and align our goals with God's goals. Jacob's dream reminds us that we are not alone in this world. I use to love watching the television show, 'Touched By An Angel' because of the powerful message given in each story. I particularly liked the part when the angels would reveal themselves to the troubled person they had been working with throughout the episode. The message always began with 'God Loves You'. No matter how bad the situation was or how terrible the sins were done by the main character, the angel would always remind him or her of God's infinite love. I believe the challenges faced by this congregation have brought folks closer together and more determined than ever. I believe God's love continues to surround us as together we celebrate that love and share this gift with others. Perhaps you are someone who feels you have made so many mistakes there is no hope. I hope you feel the love of God surrounding you right now as you are reminded that

no matter where you are in your walk of faith, God loves you and
God has a purpose for you. Amen.