

Life of Jacob Participant Handouts

If you're working with a class or small group, feel free to duplicate the following handouts in this appendix at no additional charge.

Discussion Questions

You'll find 4 to 5 questions for each lesson. Each question may include several sub-questions. These are designed to get group members engaged in discussion of the key points of the passage. If you're running short of time, feel free to skip questions or portions of questions.

Lessons

Introduction

1. **Jacob the Deceiver** (Genesis 25:19-34; 27:1-41)
2. **Jacob Meets God** (Genesis 27:41-28:22)
3. **Jacob and Laban, Rachel and Leah** (Genesis 29-31)
4. **Jacob Wrestles with God and Man** (Genesis 32-33)
5. **Jacob Returns to Bethel** (Genesis 33:17-35:29)
6. **Jacob's Depression, Fear, and Hope** (Genesis 37-47)
7. **Jacob Offers Blessings** (Genesis 46:28-49:33)

Introduction to the Life of Jacob

Timeline

Approximate dates in Jacob's life following the "early dating" of the Exodus:

Date	Event	Genesis
2006 BC	Birth of Jacob and Esau, probably in Beer-lahai-roi	25:26
1966	Marriage of Esau in Beersheba, age 40	26:34
1930	Jacob's journey to Haran, age 76	28:2
1923	Jacob's marriages, age 83, Haran	29:23, 28
1918	Birth of Judah, Jacob's age 88	29:35
1916	End of Jacob's 14 year labor for his wives, Jacob's age 90	29:30
1916	Birth of Joseph	30:23
1910	End of Jacob's stay with Laban, age 96	31:41
1910	Jacob's arrival at Shechem	33:18
1902	Rape of Dinah	34:1-2
1900	Marriage of Judah, Judah is 18, Jacob is 106	38:1-2
1899	Selling of Joseph, Joseph is 17, Jacob is 107	37:2, 27
1888	Joseph imprisoned	39:20; cf. 41:1
1886	Joseph released from prison, made ruler of Egypt	41:1, 46
1886	Death of Isaac, Isaac is 180, Jacob is 120	35:28
1879	Beginning of famine, Jacob is 127	41:54
1878	Brothers' first visit to Egypt	42:1-2
1877	Brothers' second visit to Egypt	43:1; 45:6, 11
1876	Jacob's descent to Egypt at age 130	46:6; cf. 47:9
1859	Death of Jacob at age 147	47:28
1806	Death of Joseph at age 110	50:22

Chief Places Jacob Lived

Beer-lahai-roi, Jacob's birthplace (25:11) means, "well of the Living One who sees me" (16:7). It is the site of a well in the Negev desert south of Beersheba, on the road to Shur, between Kadesh and Bered (16:14).

Beersheba, where Jacob lived as a boy, was the site of another well in the northern Negev desert. The name means "well of seven." It contains rich alluvial soil where crops could be grown and herds could be grazed. The region was controlled by Gerar, the nearest commercial center.

Gerar was a town in the western Negev desert, near Gaza, apparently controlled by Philistine or sea tribes during the patriarchal period (26:1, 8). Isaac and Jacob spent some time in Gerar (26:1) during their desert wanderings.

Haran, where Jacob labored for 20 years and raised his family, was the ancestral homeland of Jacob's ancestors. It is in present-day Turkey along the Jullab River.

Succoth, near where the Jabbok River enters the Jordan, was named after the booths (*sukkâ*) that Jacob built there for his livestock after reconciling with Easu and returning to Canaan (33:17).

Shechem is an ancient walled city that guarded the pass between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, on the main road from Jerusalem to the north. Jacob's family camped on land outside the city near the Tree of Moreh (33:18).

Bethel is where God first appeared to Jacob (28:10-22) and where he returned later with his family (35:6). Originally named Luz, Jacob renamed it Beth-el ("house of God"). It lies on the main north-south watershed route about 12 miles north of Jerusalem.

Hebron (meaning "league" or "confederacy"), lies about 19 miles south of Jerusalem, close to the Tree of Mamre. It was an occasional home for Jacob (37:14) and the final residence of Isaac (35:27). At Sarah's death, Abraham had purchased a burial cave at nearby Machpelah from Ephron the Hittite (23:1-20). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and other family members were buried there (35:27-29; 47:30; 49:30; 50:13).

Goshen is a district in Egypt where Jacob lived the last 18 years of his life. The Israelites lived here until the Exodus centuries later in an area known as the "district of Ramases" (47:6, 11), probably near Pi-Ramases.



1. Jacob the Deceiver (Genesis 25:19-34; 27:1-41)

Q1. Why does the New Testament condemn Esau for selling his birthright? (Hebrews 12:16-17) What did selling the birthright represent? What does this transaction say about Esau's character and values? What does it reveal about Jacob's character and values?

Q2. Was Rebekah a spiritual woman, that is, interested in spiritual things? Was Isaac a spiritual man? Which do you think was the more spiritually sensitive? What evidence of spirituality do you see in Jacob? In Esau?

Q3. (Genesis 27:6-29) God had told Rebekah that Jacob is supposed to rule over Esau (Genesis 25:23). To what extent does this excuse her plan to deceive her husband Isaac? How much responsibility does Jacob bear in the deception?

Q4. (Genesis 27:33) Why couldn't Isaac reverse his blessing once he discovers Jacob's trickery? What is Isaac's role in this blessing? What is God's role in it?

Q5. (Genesis 25:28) What happens when your children sense that you love one child more than another? Did such discrimination happen to you when you were growing up? If so, how are you finding healing? How can we as parents love our children equally but differently?

Q6. Extra Credit. Whose character flaws most remind you of your own? Isaac's, Rebekah's, Esau's, or Jacob's? Why? How is God working to improve your character?

2. Jacob Meets God (Genesis 27:41-28:22)

The Blessing of Abraham

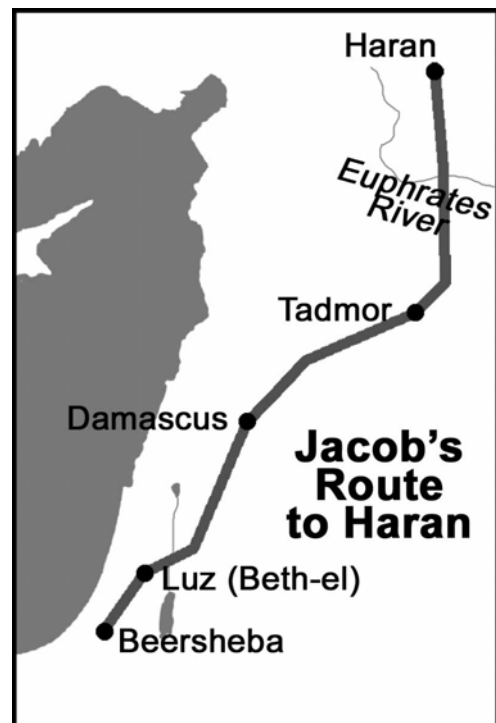
1. **Fruitfulness** – numerous descendants,
2. **Land** – the land of Canaan, and
3. **World** – the nations of the world will be blessed.

Q1. (Genesis 28:3-4) Why does Isaac bless Jacob, especially after Jacob's deception? How does this blessing compare to other blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? What are the main elements of Isaac's blessing?

Q2. (Genesis 28:12-15) What did Jacob's dream of the angels ascending and descending from heaven signify to Jacob? What did God's blessing mean to him? In what way was this a conversion experience for him?

Q3. (Genesis 28:18-21) What did it mean to Jacob to set up the stone? What did anointing the stone mean to him? Why does he do these things? What does he promise God in his vow?

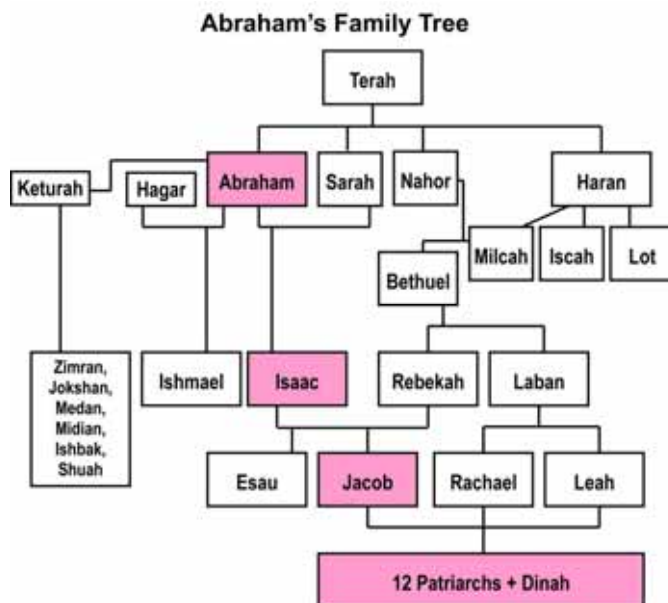
Q4. (Genesis 28:22) What does Jacob's promise to tithe indicate about his commitment? Presumably, Jacob has been a believer in Yahweh all his life. In what sense is this incident at Bethel a conversion experience for him? What is the relationship of tithing to conversion?



3. Jacob and Laban, Rachel and Leah (Genesis 29-31)

Q1. (Genesis 29) Why do you think God allows Jacob to be tricked into 14 years of labor for two wives? What purposes do you think God is working out through these circumstances?

Q2. (Genesis 30:25-43) At what point do you think Jacob realizes that his breeding techniques are not the cause of his growing wealth? According to Deuteronomy 8:17-18, what danger are we in when our income and assets begin to increase?

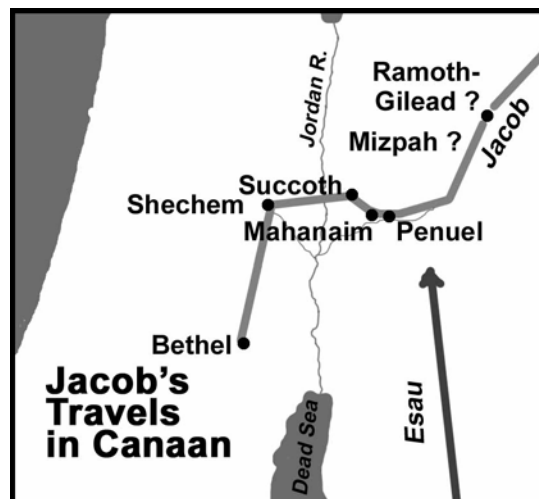


	Name	Meaning	Mother
1.	Reuben	"see, a son"	Leah
2.	Simeon	"one who hears"	Leah
3.	Levi	"attached"	Leah
4.	Judah	"praise"	Leah
5.	Dan	"he has vindicated"	Bilhah
6.	Naphtali	"my struggle"	Bilhah
7.	Gad	"good fortune" or "a troop"	Zilpah
8.	Asher	"happy"	Zilpah
9.	Issachar	"reward"	Leah
10.	Zebulun	"honor"	Leah
11.	Joseph	"may he add"	Rachel
12.	Benjamin	"son of my right hand" (35:18)	Rachel

Q3. (Genesis 31:17-36) Why did Jacob and his family leave without saying good-bye to Laban? In what sense did they "deceive" Laban? (31:20, 27) Was anything they did unjust or unrighteous? If so, how?

Q4. (Genesis 31:44-55) What are the terms of the Mizpah Covenant? Of what is the Mizpah monument supposed to remind Jacob and Laban?

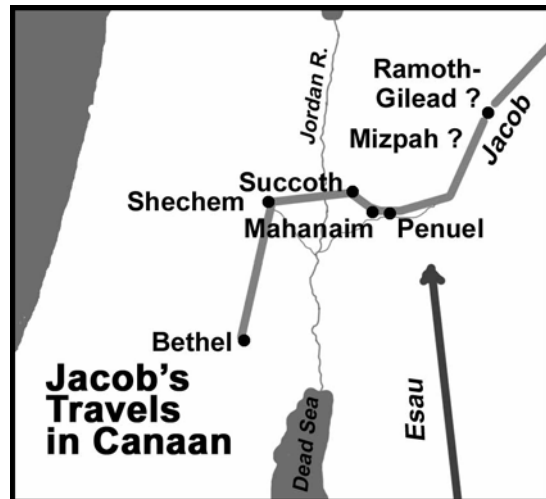
Q5. Why do we often fail to see God's blessings during the everyday conflicts of our lives? Why do blessings and conflicts so often come at the same time? What hope do we have in the midst of our struggles?



4. Jacob Wrestles with God and Man (Genesis 32-33)

Q1. (Genesis 32:1-2) Why does God reveal the angel army to Jacob? What is the significance of the presence of this army? Why do you think he calls the place Mahanaim (“two camps”)?

Q2. (Genesis 32:9-12) What does Jacob’s prayer tell us about his fears? About his faith? About his pride? What are the signs of spiritual growth you see in Jacob since he left Canaan to go to Haran years before?



Q3. (Genesis 32:24-30) Who was the “man” Jacob wrestled with? What does the wrestling represent? Was it spiritual or physical? Why does the “man” wound Jacob permanently? What do you think the limp means to him?

Q4. (Genesis 33:1-16) How has Esau changed since Jacob had gone to Haran? How has Jacob changed? How does the encounter demonstrate Jacob’s “craftiness”? How does it demonstrate his faith? Can Jacob be humble and “crafty” at the same time?

5. Jacob Returns to Bethel (Genesis 33:17-35:29)

Q1. (Genesis 34) Why do you think Jacob is so silent after the rape of his daughter? What should he have done instead of being silent? What was right about the sons' reaction? What was wrong? What threat does the family now face if they stay in Shechem?

Q2. What happened when the Israelites disobeyed God and intermarried with the Canaanites? Why do you think God commanded them not to intermarry? Was this racial or spiritual or both? Why are Christians to marry "in the Lord"?

Q3. (Genesis 35:1-5) Why does Jacob's household need spiritual renewal? Why is it important to get rid of foreign gods? What do washing and putting on clean clothes represent? What "foreign gods" do you need to throw away? In what ways do you need to repent and lead a new, clean life?

Q4. (Genesis 35:9-15) Why do you think God appears to Jacob yet another time? What are the primary promises that God renews to Jacob?

Q5. (Genesis 35:22) What is the significance of Reuben's sin? In what way does it go beyond a sexual sin? We're not told, but how do you think this affected the family dynamics? Extra credit: Reuben has acted dishonorably here. In what ways does Reuben act honorably in the future? (37:21-29; 42:22, 37)?

6. Jacob's Depression, Fear, and Hope (Genesis 37-47)

Q1. (Genesis 37:31-35) What does bringing the blood-stained robe to Jacob say about these sons' attitude toward their father? How does this loss affect Jacob? How do you think it affects his future behavior?

Q2. (Genesis 42:35-43:14) What is Jacob's state of mind after the first trip to Egypt? If you were a psychologist, how would you diagnose him? What factors have paralyzed Jacob mentally and spiritually? Why do you think Jacob changed his mind about going again to secure grain?

Q3. (Genesis 45:4-8) Contrast Jacob and Joseph. Jacob has suffered great loss. Joseph has suffered great injustice. Why is Jacob's vision so bleak, but Joseph's so broad? What have been their differing responses to fear? What insight has kept Joseph from being bitter towards his brothers?

Q4. (Genesis 46:2-4) Faith is what quiets our fears. What in God's word to Jacob at Beersheba quiets his fears? God had brought the same assurance to Jacob before (28:15; 31:3). Why do you think he had stopped believing it? What is the relationship between faith and God's words?

7. Jacob Offers Blessings (Genesis 46:28-49:33)

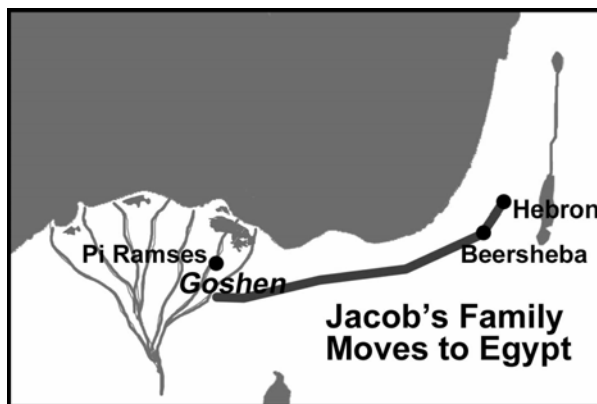
Q1. (Genesis 47:9) In what sense is life on earth like a “pilgrimage” or a journey with no permanent home? What happens to us when we settle down and get too comfortable with our lives? How do we retain a “journeying spirit” in our faith?

Ages in the Patriarchal Era

Nahor	119 years	(11:24)
Terah	205 years	(11:32)
Abraham	175 years	(25:7)
Isaac	180 years	(35:28)
Jacob	147 years	(47:28)
Joseph	110 years	(50:22)

Q2. (Genesis 48) Why does Jacob cross his hands when blessing Ephraim and Manasseh? Why does Joseph try to stop him? In what sense are Jacob’s blessings an actual prophecy from God?

Q3. Why do we equate blessing with a lack of crisis in our lives? What are the effects of crises on our faith? How do they help us grow in our faith? Why do they sometimes destroy our faith?



Q4. (Genesis 48:15) How did God act as a Shepherd to Jacob? How does God act as a Shepherd to you? Do you trust him or rebel against his shepherding?