

## Roller-Coaster Ride

---

Jacob's life story captures me. The younger of twin boys, he strikes his first questionable deal by enticing Esau into selling his birthright for a simple meal (Gen. 25). Perhaps as a result of this, Jacob later teams up with his mom to steal his dad's non-retractable blessing reserved for his older brother (Gen. 27). Consequently he must flee.

- These two incidents are enough to portray Jacob as a crook. And I wonder: How would we handle a guy like him? Challenge his attitude? Try to straighten him out? Or simply avoid him?

God didn't avoid him. On his flight to Paddan Aram, Jacob has a life changing encounter with his Creator. But since character doesn't change over night, he is faithful to his habit trying to strike a deal, this time with God himself (Gen. 28). Ending up at his uncle Laban's house, Jacob falls madly in love with the younger of the two daughters. Another deal sees him working for Laban 7 years faithfully for Rachel's hand. Yet this time Jacob gets betrayed as his uncle withholds Rachel, giving him the older Leah to be his wife instead. Now forced to agree on another deal, Jacob works a further 7 years for the women he so much loves (Gen. 29).

- We cannot help but sense some kind of justice kicking in here, can we? Jacob, having deceived his twin brother twice, now gets deceived himself by his uncle. Its payback-time! What you sow is what you reap, isn't it? And I wonder: How many of us are showing malicious joy?

But not so God. Many moons later, after the birth of Joseph, Jacob asks his uncle to release him back to his homeland. Yet, as Laban learns through divination that the Lord blesses him on Jacob's account, he is very reluctant to let his son-in-law go. Eventually the two men agree on yet another deal, which Laban breaches straight away by removing all animals he promised to hand over to Jacob. Realizing this, Jacob takes the famous, yet unorthodox action with peeled branches in the watering troughs, which ultimately makes him exceedingly prosperous (Gen. 30).

- The whole story unfolds like a bestselling drama loaded with betrayals and deception and you wonder: Whom should we side with? I'm not an expert in this but have always wondered how peeled branches of a certain wood in a watering trough would create streaked, speckled, dark-colored and spotted offspring from mating animals. But perhaps that's not the issue here. Like in really good movies the truth and real issues unfold as we plot along towards the climax and end of this narrative.

To escape jealousy and false accusations by his family related by marriage, Jacob obeys God's instructions to pack up and leave for his homeland. The family council with his wives reveals that Laban never stuck to his words and agreements, that it was indeed God giving Jacob the unorthodox instructions concerning the animals (perhaps nothing more than a test of obedience?), and that both Leah and Rachel were upset being sold by their father like slaves. So, having served Laban faithfully for two decades, the whole Jacob clan leaves with all their possession, with a furious Laban in hot pursuit. But thanks to God, their encounter ends up on a rather good note while parting ways (Gen. 31).

- Right up to here the story is already loaded with so much action and twists that we would need more space and time to explore the whole depth of it. But because there's more to come on this roller-coaster ride this question should suffice: If we would have to assess who is in the right and who in the wrong here, what would be the base for our assessment? Presumption? What we see and what we hear from others? Or would we allow God to reveal to us what he sees?

Returning home leaves Jacob with one more issue to resolve: Facing his brother, whom he betrayed immensely! Genesis 32 and 33 is a gripping account that provides us with an amazing insight into how Jacob dealt with his fear, revealing how his character and attitude has changed, his wrestling with God, employing a wise strategy and finally, reconciling with Esau on a good note.

- This whole narrative has all the ingredients of tossing us to and fro in our emotions with whom to side. Just like in our lives today when we watch the life of those around us, I guess. But taking it a bit more into our personal context, are we open for the truth, asking ourselves a few tough questions? Are we acting deceitfully to gain advantage, like Jacob did in his early years? Are we willing to serve faithfully even for years and honor our word as Jacob did later, even if the one we serve betrays us? Are we open for the Lord to change our character and mode of operation from “I-will-make-things-happen-for-me” to “God-is-in-charge”? Rather than fight for what we consider to be rightfully ours, would we allow and trust God to replace what has been stolen? Are we be willing to pack up immediately and move our whole household to wherever God sends us? Are we ready to confront injustice when God orchestrates the encounter with those who want to do us harm? Are we be humble enough to admit our fears and mistakes? Are we be willing to make right with those we betrayed? Are we willing and ready to “wrestle” with God to receive his blessing? Are we ready and willing to give God the glory when he sorts our roller-coaster life out, bringing it on solid tracks?