

## **A FAST Biblical Portrait: Isaac and Jacob** ***The Woes of a Passive Father and a Passive Son***

John Kain, 2010

*Every one of our personality traits has its good side and its bad. Consider Isaac, a passive man who apparently quietly accepted his father's near sacrifice of him when he was a young man. That was the good side of passivity, but the main point of that scene is Abraham's faith in the Lord.*

*Now consider the flip side of passivity: Isaac is portrayed as doing nothing of significance other than serving as a biological link between Abraham and Jacob. After his father's servant found Rebecca and brought her home to be Isaac's wife, Rebecca apparently took over. When their twins were born, Rebecca showed partiality to Jacob, the quieter, stay-at-home son (Genesis 25:27). She taught Jacob how to cook, arranged for him to get his father's blessing, and later protected him from his angry brother Esau by sending him to her brother Laban.*

*Before we look more closely at the ups and downs of Jacob's life, consider these two key background truths that his life illustrates.*

- (1) Passive males, who ignore God's commands about integrity and marriage (in this case, Jacob had more than one spouse at the same time), experience and cause much unhappiness.***
- (2) The transforming power of fellowship with God can and does prevail over our faults.***

Early in his life, Jacob cheated his brother Esau out of his birthright (Genesis 25:29–34), and later Jacob deceived his aged father in order to receive the blessing that didn't belong to him (Genesis 27:1–29). Forced to flee for his life, Jacob fled to Haran under the pretense of needing to choose a wife there (Genesis 27:41; 28:1–5).

Despite Jacob's sinful ways, God indicated to him in a magnificent dream—Jacob's first significant spiritual experience recorded in Genesis—that he would honor the ill-gotten blessing his father had given him (Genesis 28:1-15). Yet in that same chapter we see that Jacob was still being a manipulator and that he was trying to manipulate God: "If God will give me food, clothing, and safety, then he will be my God, and I'll return a tenth of my earnings" (see verses 20-21). Even though God had just promised to bless him, Jacob tried to cut a deal.

While Jacob was in Haran, his romance with Rachel was spoiled by deception (Genesis 29:15-30). There began Jacob's long and sordid struggle with his father-in-law and with the jealousy between his wives (Genesis 30:1-43). When God called Jacob to return to the Promised Land (Genesis 31:3), Jacob departed secretly, only to be pursued by his father-in-law (Genesis 31:19-30). As Jacob continued toward home, he was met by angelic messengers (Genesis 32:1-2) and the news that his brother was approaching with four hundred men, news that prompted Jacob to resort to prayer (Genesis 32:3-12).

Jacob spent a night wrestling with God in prayerful, desperate pleading. As a result, his name was changed to Israel, meaning "he struggles with God" (Genesis 32:24-32). This name change came when Jacob finally began to hold on to God, indicating a dependence on the Almighty.

The story of Jacob continued as he met with his brother Esau (Genesis 33:1-16); moved on to the city of Shechem in Canaan (Genesis 33:18); learned that his daughter Dinah had been defiled by Shechem (Genesis 34:1-5); and realized that his sons' acts of revenge would bring him further trouble (Genesis 34:7-31). God then called Jacob to go to Bethel. There, Jacob remembered his vision and built an altar (Genesis 35:1-15).

Although Jacob did not live happily ever after, he seemed to end his life with greater faith than he began it. Furthermore, in spite of his and his father Isaac's many weaknesses, they both were a chosen instrument of God, and the Lord used them in his kingdom history.