

September 6, 2015

Heroes of Faith

"Isn't he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing."
Genesis 27:36

"I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth...All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go..."
Genesis 28:13-15

"The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered...But while Joseph was there in the prison the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor..."
Genesis 39:2 & 21

"And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you...God sent me ahead of you to preserve you..."
Genesis 45:5

Among the greatest heroes of faith in the Old Testament are two, Jacob and Joseph, who present us with several contrasts in the type of people God uses for his purposes. Jacob was the second twin son born to Isaac, the son of Abraham. He was born grasping his brother's heel and was named "the deceiver" which was a name he seems to have lived down to.

As a young adult Jacob instigated two major deceptions on his brother, one gave him the birthright and the other his father's blessing. Having made his brother his sworn enemy Jacob had to flee from his home and ended up living with his uncle who taught him what it was like to be the victim of deceit and whom he, in turn, deceived.



Jacob is an example of a man who was far from perfect; who was an obvious sinner, and yet God chose to use him and eventually renamed him Israel. Jacob became the father of the nation that God had promised to build through the descendants of Abraham.

In contrast to Jacob, his eleventh son Joseph became a man of great faith and wisdom who always chose to believe in God despite his circumstances. Jacob would eventually have twelve sons, but Joseph was always his favorite. As he grew older God gave Joseph visions which hinted at what his life would eventually be, but those visions also made his brothers despise him even more.

Eventually they sold him as a slave into Egypt. There he served the captain of the guard and was so blessed that he rose to become the favorite slave in this man's household. Eventually a false accusation sent Joseph to prison, but even there he was blessed and again rose to a place of importance.

Finally, Joseph was delivered from prison and raised to one of the highest positions in the land. He created a plan to save not only Egypt, but much of the known world from starvation and eventually reunited with his brothers.



While most of us would probably have relished an opportunity to get a little pay back, Joseph understood that God was working everything together, even all of the set-backs and hardships, in order to work his will and to save the world.

Jacob was a deceiver who very often chose the wrong course in life, but God chose to use him to father a great nation. Joseph was a strong believer who persevered despite a life of trial and was eventually used to fulfill God's purpose in great ways.

In our lives we often reflect both of these men. Sometimes we make really lousy choices and yet God can still use us for his purposes. Sometimes we make all of the right choices and yet things go badly for us and even in this, God is at work to do his will. In writing to the Roman believers the Apostle Paul summed it up well, ***"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*** (Romans 8:28)