

JACOB
A Struggling Faith

Jacob's journey to his uncle's land includes a personal encounter with God at Bethel, and then at last he reaches his destination.

Read Genesis 29:1-30.

1. Briefly tell what happened.

2. Using Scripture to support your answer, describe Jacob's love for Rachel.

3. Jacob, the great trickster, is tricked!

a) What kind of feelings do you think you might have experienced if you had been in Jacob's sandals at this point?

b) Thinking about how he responds to the situation, what worthy character trait(s) does Jacob exhibit?

Read Genesis 29:31-30:43.

4. What signs do you see in this section that any of these people recognize the power and rule of God in the affairs of their lives? (Please refer to verse numbers.)

Read Genesis 31:1-13.

5. Why did Jacob decide to return to his homeland?

Jacob is learning to listen to God and learning that indeed God has been taking care of him through the ups and downs of all these years. Still he is given to deceit (Genesis 31:20) and often counting on his own resources to secure what he wants.

Read Genesis 31:36-42.

6. What was it like for Jacob to have a person like Laban in his life for twenty years?

Once again Jacob is on the road. This time he is going toward his homeland with wives, children, servants, flocks and goods.

Read Genesis 32:1-23.

7. Again our account begins with God taking the initiative to reach out to Jacob. In spite of this, what emotions does Jacob experience as he anticipates meeting Esau (verses 7 and 11) and why would he feel this way?

8. a) What different tack does Jacob take this time as he considers coming up against a potentially dangerous situation (verses 9-12)?

b) Do you think this is significant? Explain.

Jacob had prepared as best he could to meet Esau and then he was alone, facing into a long dark night of waiting.

Read Genesis 32:24-32.

9. Do you think Jacob had a choice in whether or not he would wrestle with this man? Support your answer from the text.

10. Who was this wrestling with Jacob and how do you know (verses 26-30 and Hosea 12:3-4)?

NOTE: The Bible records times when God reveals Himself in human form, one indication that He is personal and self-giving, choosing to be involved in our individual lives. Sometimes the messenger is called the Angel of the Lord. Hosea 12:3-4 uses *angel* to describe this incident in Jacob's life. The Angel of the Lord is a term referring to a direct manifestation of God. Jesus' birth, life and death was the culmination of God reaching out to each of us, "Him whom the Father...sent into the world," the pre-existent Son. Such encounters as Jacob had in Genesis 32:24 was the Father sending the Son in veiled form to touch a human life.

11. What happened as Jacob wrestled with the "Man" (verse 25)?

12. Until the searing pain shot through his body, Jacob possibly thought that if he just hung in there long enough he could prevail and overpower this opponent. After all, his track record showed that he was good, and could come out on top by tenacity and shrewdness. What do you think dawned on Jacob about the power and identity of his opponent as he was seized with agony--and saddled with a useless leg?

Still Jacob hung on. Why? Consider how John White, a physician, explains it. *Have you ever tried wrestling with lumbago or a slipped disc? If you should ever find yourself in Jacob's situation, let me tell you what you will do. You will cling. You will hang onto your opponent with desperation. Either you cling or you fall.*

And through the fog of pain and terror the words begin to penetrate Jacob's brain: "Let me go, for the day is breaking."

Let him go? How can he? He isn't even sure whether he can walk. Let him go? How dare he? At some point the awful knowledge has gripped him that the one on whose breast he leans sweating and gasping is the God of his fathers, who could slay him with a glance. And for once, since he has no choice, no other hope, Jacob's tenacity is turned in the right direction.

"I will not let you go, unless you bless me."

John White in *Daring to Draw Near*

13. Considering the situation Jacob would face as a new day dawned, why do you think this struggle with God was particularly timely?

14. a) What is significant to you about Jacob's insisting on being blessed by his opponent? (For instance, was this an act of faith?)

b) What blessing does Jacob receive from God (verses 27-29)?

c) What does each name mean:

Jacob

Israel

15. Jacob came out of his struggle with God both broken and blessed. What was his response (verse 30)?

Read again Genesis 32:24-32

16. In what way did Jacob win by losing that night? Think about what he must have learned about himself and about his God.

NOTE: In the Bible, Israel is the chief name for God's people. To belong to God is to be a "God wrestler." We see this reflected in many of the Psalms when the writer struggles with God concerning broken dreams, heavy duties, painful humiliations or shameful memories. We see the prime example of one wrestling with God when we see Jesus in the garden before He walks out to meet His death and later on the cross as He cries "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me!" (Read Luke 22:41-44 and Matthew 27:45-46.) Jesus knew Judas was the one who had betrayed Him (Luke 22:2-4, 48), thus setting in motion his journey to the cross. And yet, Jesus wrestled with God as though this circumstance was God's choice for Him. Notice that Judas' name never came up in Jesus' prayer.

17. Think of a difficult circumstance you are faced with right now. From the perspective that God is wrestling with you (as He did with Jacob) as you face this circumstance, what will this "wrestling" look like?

18. What would be God's ultimate purpose for such a painful struggle?

19. Based on this account in Jacob's life what things must you do as you wrestle with God in any situation? (There are at least two--Genesis 32:26b)

Lord, I trust You and I am willing to be blessed through brokenness. Teach me a healthy dependency, and then meet me in my helplessness. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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