

Jacob Becomes Israel



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 29–33.*

Memory Text: “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed” (*Genesis 32:28*).

Jacob's 20 years of service in Mesopotamia were characterized by jealousy, contention, and intrigue. One sister sought to outdo the other in the number of sons she bore as both vied for first place in their husband's affections. Son-in-law and father-in-law shone in their attempts to deceive each other, with Laban manifesting interest only in his own advancement. The biblical story notes more faith in potions and human schemes than in God. Again, how little has changed in thousands of years.

Yet, while these same chapters reveal how groundless is trust in human power, they reveal how certain is the reality of the divine promises of mercy, forgiveness, and acceptance (how fortunate for us that hasn't changed either!). Indeed, even amid all these sad stories of human faithlessness, deceit, jealousy, and intrigue, we can see the mercy of God at work, a stunning and powerful testament to God's grace for fallen human beings.

This is seen, perhaps, most vividly in Jacob's night of wrestling. Here, again, we can see just how close the Lord can come to those who in true faith and repentance seek Him. At Jabbok, repentant Jacob became Israel, and God's plan triumphed in spite of the apparently unpromising human material with which He had to work.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 16.*

Family Woes

In the story of Jacob and Rachel and Leah (*Genesis 29*), there's more deception, only now Jacob is the victim instead of the perpetrator. Maybe he learned some lessons about deception after being on the receiving end of it.

Jacob's marriage to two sisters, which later Mosaic law prohibited while the first sister was alive (*Lev. 18:18*), was marred by a great deal of intrigue, jealousy, bickering, and sadness. God allowed this practice; He also allowed the bitter consequences that always seemed to follow it.

In a society in which children signified God's favor and attracted the husband's love, God blessed Leah with several children. The names given to the children of both wives and maidservants reflect the feelings of Leah and Rachel at the birth of those infants and testified to the contention that existed between them. The names either are derived from or resemble the sound of the Hebrew verbs associated with the names.

Read Genesis 30:1-4. Where have we seen this practice before? What does it mean that children keep repeating the sins of the parents?

Read Genesis 30:5-13. What sinful force is driving these actions?

By the end of this section, Jacob had fathered the children of four different women, for Rachel eventually conceived and bore Joseph (*Gen. 30:22-24*). Thus, he now lived in a single home with four women, some loved more than others, some holding higher "status" than others, yet all the mothers of his twelve children. Talk about a formula for contention, jealousy, and intrigue! All this would later bear bitter fruit, especially in the life of Jacob, who should have known better and who, having been given promises by God (*Gen. 28:10-22*), should have trusted in those promises without having to resort to polygamy.

What challenges are you facing, right now, that make it difficult to live by faith rather than by sight? How can you learn to trust in God's promises so that you don't resort to the wrong means in order to see those promises fulfilled?

Jacob's Wages (*Gen. 30:25-43*)

How did the schemers, Laban and Jacob, attempt to outsmart each other after Jacob had requested permission for himself and his family to return to his native country? *Vss. 26-43.*

The form of payment agreed on extended Jacob's stay for another six years (*Gen. 31:41*). Jacob's request appears magnanimous when we realize that in the Near East "goats, as a rule, are black or dark brown, rarely white or spotted with white, and that sheep are for the most part white, seldom black or speckled."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 394. As Laban would be left with all the pure-color animals, the deal seemed advantageous to Jacob's father-in-law.

How did Laban seek to prevent any off-color characteristics being bred back into the pure-color stock? *Gen. 30:35, 36.*

To what ancient superstition did Jacob resort after any possible attempt at selected breeding had been thwarted by Laban's separation of the stock? *Vss. 37-43.*

Jacob, as well as Laban, seemed to be unaware of the fact that even those animals that appeared to be pure in color still carried in them recessive color characteristics that could be transmitted to their offspring. Being at a loss as to what he should do, Jacob took refuge in the mistaken belief that vivid sights experienced by a mother during conception or pregnancy would mark her offspring.

While to all intents and purposes Jacob's stratagems appeared to meet with success (*vs. 43*), what message did God convey to the patriarch in a dream? *Gen. 31:7-12.*

Jacob attributed his success to God's blessing (*vss. 7, 9*), and the Lord blessed him in spite of his superstitious beliefs (*vs. 12*). Indeed, the dream of verses 10-12 may have been intended to explain to the patriarch how the recessive off-color characteristics were passed on by the pure-color parents. God used the occasion for a miracle and blessed Jacob, not because of his skill or ingenuity but in order to thwart Laban's exploitation.

Even despite all of Jacob's mistakes, the Lord was still with him. What hope does this offer you, despite the mistakes you have already made?

Jacob's Flight to Canaan (*Genesis 31*)

Read Genesis 31:1-16. What happened that prompted Jacob to finally leave?

As a result of his greed, Laban alienated his daughters and changed Jacob's wages ten times. Laban's absence provided the opportunity for Jacob to leave Mesopotamia (*vss. 17-21*). Rachel's theft of her father's household deities may testify to the fact that her beautiful appearance concealed a half-converted heart. After thirteen years of marriage, she still had not submitted fully to the God worshiped by her husband (*vs. 19*).

What sanctimonious accusation did Laban level against Jacob when he overtook him after covering a distance of more than three hundred miles? *Vss. 22-30*.

Conscious of his innocence, Jacob then invoked the death penalty upon the one in whose possession the household gods were to be found (*vs. 32*). While such a penalty was in harmony with Mesopotamian law, it was as foolish and rash a decision as was that of Jacob's sons years later (*Gen. 44:9*). Rachel's ruse demonstrated that she was the daughter of Laban, partaking of his character (*Gen. 31:32-35*). Since Laban was unable to support any of his charges, Jacob reprimanded his father-in-law angrily and attributed his own success to the God of his father (*vss. 36-42*).

Read carefully Jacob's reply to Laban (*vss. 36-42*). What can we learn from it about the character of Jacob that helps explain God's blessing on him?

In the end, despite Jacob's innocence, he ultimately gave all the credit to the Lord. This shows that, whatever his mistakes, he knew the Lord and the reality of the Lord working in his life. Despite his faults, he was seeking to live by faith. How important that we all have the same experience for ourselves, that of having "the fear of Isaac" (*vs. 42*) with us.

Jacob and Esau (*Gen. 32:1-32*)

Soon after he separates from Laban and is now on his own after so many years, Jacob is met by two angels (*Gen. 32:1, 2*). Though the text doesn't say what, if anything, that they said to him, no doubt their presence at that place certainly gave him some courage and confidence. Perhaps that explains why, in the next verse, he decides to send messengers to his brother.

Notice that in the message he calls himself “thy servant Jacob” (*vs. 4*). **Why do you think he would use that term with his brother?** See *Gen. 25:23; 27:29, 37*.

After the messengers return, their words are ominous. They gave no reply from Esau to the friendly message Jacob had sent. Instead, they say that Esau is coming toward Jacob with 400 men. No wonder Jacob was “greatly afraid and distressed” (*vs. 7*).

Read Jacob's prayer in verses 9-12. **What are the basic elements of the prayer? What was he praying for? What promises was he claiming? How did the prayer show his dependence upon the Lord?**

However sincere and heartfelt the prayer, Jacob was also going to use some diplomacy and wisdom (*vss. 13-21*). He had hoped that with all these gifts he could “appease” (*vs. 20*) his brother. Perhaps there's a lesson here: Sure, we need to pray, we need to lean on the Lord, but at the same time we need to do all that we can within our power, all that is in accordance with God's will, to see that prayer answered.

Jump ahead to Genesis 33. **What can we see in the interaction between both these brothers to show that they were changed men since the last time they had seen each other?**

Regardless of whatever spiritual growth both had over the years, time also tends to heal wounds. What can you do, until time applies its healing balm, to help alleviate whatever pain you might be feeling over past wrongs?

Jacob's Night of Fighting and Faith

Read Genesis 32:23-32. What does this account say to you? What's the lesson you can learn from this story about your own "struggles" with God? See also *Hos. 12:4*.

Ellen White is clear that Jacob was wrestling with Christ, the "Angel of the covenant."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 197. No wonder that twice in the depiction of the night of wrestling the texts state that it was indeed God who had appeared to Jacob that night. Here, again, we see just how up close and personal the Lord is willing to get with His people.

What is the significance of the name change?

As Jacob perceived that he had struggled with a supernatural being, he pleaded for a blessing (*vs. 26*). His petition and perseverance were rewarded by a change of name. No longer would his name be Jacob ("to seize the heel" and by extension "to overreach" or "to deceive"). Now it would be Israel ("he strives with God").

Read verse 30. What meaning can you draw from the words that Jacob uttered? How could that apply to us today?

Jacob, when it was all over, said that he had seen the face of God and lived. In a sense, this is the same opportunity offered to all humanity through the death of Jesus. Jesus was God in the flesh, and through His life and substitutionary death He brought reconciliation between heaven and earth. Because of Jesus and what He has done, we all can, in a sense, "see the face of God" and live. Our past sins, like Jacob's past sins, no longer have to guarantee our destruction before the face of Him who is "a consuming fire" (*Heb. 12:29*).

In what ways have you been striving with God? What does it mean to strive with God? Might you even come away from such striving, like Jacob, with a "limp"?

Further Study: Read also *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 190–203, and *The SDA Bible Commentary*; comments on Genesis 29:31–35:29.

“Though Jacob had left Padan-aram in obedience to the divine direction, it was not without many misgivings that he retraced the road which he had trodden as a fugitive twenty years before. His sin in the deception of his father was ever before him. He knew that his long exile was the direct result of that sin, and he pondered over these things day and night, the reproaches of an accusing conscience making his journey very sad. As the hills of his native land appeared before him in the distance, the heart of the patriarch was deeply moved. All the past rose vividly before him. With the memory of his sin came also the thought of God’s favor toward him, and the promises of divine help and guidance.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 195.

“Jacob had received the blessing for which his soul had longed. His sin as a supplanter and deceiver had been pardoned. The crisis in his life was past. Doubt, perplexity, and remorse had embittered his existence, but now all was changed; and sweet was the peace of reconciliation with God. Jacob no longer feared to meet his brother. God, who had forgiven his sin, could move the heart of Esau also to accept his humiliation and repentance.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 198.

Discussion Questions:

1 As a class, discuss the actions of Jacob in preparing to meet Esau. Why did he work so hard to try to appease his brother? Shouldn’t the promises that God had made to him been enough to cause him to move ahead only by faith? Was he showing a lack of faith by his actions, or was it faith in action?

2 Ask those willing to talk about an occasion when time healed some painful wound. What lessons can be learned from those experiences? What can we do to help people hurting from wounds that can take a long time to heal?

The Troublesome Boy, Part 1

by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

When Samuel was six, a village leader invited an Adventist teacher to come and start a school in their town. Soon Samuel enrolled in the simple mud-brick schoolhouse that stood in the village. The teacher started a Sabbath School in the village, as well.

Samuel's father thought that students in the Adventist school must attend Sabbath School, too, so he sent Samuel to church every Sabbath morning. But, instead, Samuel hid in the bush until church ended. When his father learned what he had done, he beat Samuel.

Finally Samuel went to church on Sabbath—and he loved it. He especially enjoyed the stories about Jesus. He eagerly told his father what he was learning there.

Samuel's family worshiped traditional gods of wood and stone, and his father worried that Samuel was becoming a Christian. He told Samuel to stay away from the church. But Samuel had learned to love God and did not want to worship the family's idols. When he refused, his father again threatened to beat him.

He forced Samuel to go with him to the family farm on Sabbath. Samuel was still quite young and did not know what to do, so he asked the church members to pray for him.

When Samuel told the pastor the problems he faced, the pastor visited Samuel's father, who reluctantly agreed to allow Samuel to attend Sabbath services, provided he returned home after church and went directly to the farm to work.

Samuel thanked his father for working out a compromise. Samuel was glad that he could spend at least part of the day worshiping God. He studied at the Adventist school and attended the Adventist church, learning all he could about Christianity.

As he neared completion of elementary school, he dreamed of studying at the Adventist boarding school in the city thirty miles from home. He knew that his father did not have the money to pay his school fees in such a school. All he could do was pray.

(Continued next week)

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