

Jacob Becomes Israel



SABBATH—DECEMBER 9

READ FOR THIS WEEK’S STUDY: Genesis 29–33.

MEMORY VERSE: “Your name will not be Jacob anymore. Instead, it will be Israel. You have struggled with God and with men. And you have won” (Genesis 32:28, NIRV).

JACOB’S 20 YEARS OF SERVICE (WORK) IN MESOPOTAMIA WAS FILLED WITH JEALOUSY, QUARRELING, AND EVIL PLANNING. One sister tried to beat the other sister in having more sons. They both competed for first place in their husband’s love. Son-in-law and father-in-law shone in trying to deceive each other. Laban showed interest only in promoting himself. The Bible story notes more faith in potions (drugs) and human plans than in God. How little has changed in thousands of years!

Genesis 29–33 show that there is no good reason to trust in human power. Genesis 29–33 also show that God’s promises of mercy,¹ forgiveness, and acceptance are sure and real. (How fortunate for us God has not changed either!) Among all these sad stories of human faithlessness, jealousy, and evil planning, we can see God’s mercy at work. This is a stunning and powerful testament (testimony) to God’s grace for sinners.

We can see this clearly in Jacob’s night of wrestling. Here, again, we can see just how close God can come to those who in faith and repentance² look for Him. At Jabbok, repentant³ Jacob became Israel. And God’s plan succeeded, even though He had to work with weak human material.

¹mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

²repentance—being sorry for your sins, wanting to stop sinning, and turning away from your sins.

³repentant—being sorry for your sins and wanting to stop sinning.

SUNDAY—DECEMBER 10**FAMILY PROBLEMS (Genesis 29)**

In the story of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah, there is more trickery. This time Jacob is the victim instead of the person who plays the trick!

Jacob married two sisters. Later, Moses' law did not permit a second marriage while the first sister was alive (Leviticus 18:18). Anyway, Jacob's marriage was bothered by a great deal of evil planning, jealousy, quarreling, and sadness. God allowed these marriages. He also allowed the bitter results that followed it.

In those days, people thought that children showed God's favor and attracted the husband's love. So God blessed Leah with several children. The names of the children of both wives and maidservants show the feelings of Leah and Rachel at the birth of these babies. The names also showed the quarreling that came up between them. The names either come from or sound like the Hebrew verbs⁴ that come 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 their parents?

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

By the end of this part of the story,

Jacob had fathered the children of four different women. Rachel later gave birth to Joseph (Genesis 30:22-24). So Jacob lived in a home with four women. Jacob loved some of them more than others. Some held higher "status" than others. But all were the mothers of his 12 children. Talk about a recipe for quarreling, jealousy, and evil planning! All this would later bear bitter fruit for Jacob, who should have known God better. God had given Jacob many promises (Genesis 28:10-22). He should have trusted those promises without having to depend on having many wives.

What challenges are you facing that make it difficult to live by faith rather than by seeing? How can you learn to trust God's promises so you do not depend on the wrong methods to get those promises fulfilled?

MONDAY—DECEMBER 11**JACOB'S WAGES
(Genesis 30:25-43)**

How did Laban and Jacob try to outsmart each other after Jacob had asked permission for himself and his family to return to his own country? Genesis 30:25-43.

The agreement on payment forced Jacob to stay for another six years (Genesis 31:41). Jacob seems to make a generous offer because in the

⁴verbs—words that show action.

Near East “goats, as a rule, are black or dark brown. They are rarely white or spotted with white, and sheep are for the most part white. They are rarely black or speckled (spotted).” —Adapted from *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 394. As Laban would have all the pure-color animals, the deal seemed to be an advantage for Jacob’s father-in-law.

How did Laban try to stop his pure-color animals from having off-color characteristics? Genesis 30:35, 36.

To what false belief did Jacob depend on after Laban separated his “pure” animals from Jacob’s “spotted” animals? Genesis 30:37-43.

Both Jacob and Laban did not seem to know that those animals that appeared to be pure in color still carried in them some color genes⁵ that could be passed on to their babies. Not knowing what he should do, Jacob experimented with the false belief that looking at strong patterns during pregnancy would help a mother mark her babies.

Jacob’s planning appeared to meet with success (Genesis 30:43). But what message did God give to him in a dream? Genesis 31:7-12.

Jacob gave credit to God’s blessing

for his success (Genesis 31:9). God blessed him, even though his beliefs were false (Genesis 31:12). So, the dream of Genesis 31:10-12 may have been God’s way of showing Jacob how the off-color genes were passed on by the pure-color parents. God used this opportunity to show Jacob that He did not let Laban take advantage of him.

Jacob made many mistakes. But God was still with him. What hope does this offer you?

TUESDAY—DECEMBER 12

JACOB’S ESCAPE TO CANAAN (Genesis 31)

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

As a result of his selfishness, Laban made his daughters angry at him. He also changed Jacob’s wages ten times. Laban’s absence gave Jacob a chance to leave Mesopotamia (Genesis 31:17-21). Rachel stole her father’s household idols. This may show the fact that her beautiful appearance hid a half-converted heart. After 13 years of marriage, Rachel still had not surrendered fully to her husband’s God (Genesis 31:19).

What “holier-than-thou” charge did Laban make against Jacob

⁵genes—the “cells” we are born with. Genes determine what color our hair and eyes are. Genes also determine things such as what size we are.

when he caught up with him? (Genesis 31:22-30).

Jacob believed he was innocent. So he told Laban that anyone who was found having the stolen idols would not live (Genesis 31:32). This kind of penalty followed Mesopotamian law. But it was a foolish decision. Jacob's sons made the same foolish decision years later (Genesis 44:9). Rachel's act showed she was the daughter of Laban because she had his character (Genesis 31:32-35). Since Laban was unable to support any of his charges, Jacob scolded his father-in-law and gave credit for success to God (Genesis 31:36-42).

Read carefully Jacob's answer to Laban in Genesis 31:36-42. What can we learn from this answer about Jacob's character that helps explain God's blessing on him?

In the end, Jacob was innocent. But he gave all the credit to God. This shows that, no matter what mistakes he had made, Jacob knew that God was working in his life. Jacob had faults. But he was trying to live by faith. How important that we all be like Jacob in this way.

WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 13

JACOB AND ESAU (Genesis 32:1-32)

Soon Jacob separated from Laban, and was on his own after so many

years. Then two angels came to him (Genesis 32:1, 2). The verses do not say what they said to him. But the angels' appearance gave Jacob courage and confidence. Perhaps that explains why Jacob decides to send messengers to his brother (Genesis 32:3).

Notice that in his message, Jacob calls himself "your servant Jacob" (Genesis 32:4, NIV). Why do you think he would use the word *servant*? Read Genesis 24:23; Genesis 27:29, 37.

The messengers return with bad news. They give no answer from Esau to the friendly message Jacob had sent. Instead, they say that Esau is coming toward Jacob with four hundred men. No wonder Jacob was "very worried and afraid" (Genesis 32:7, NIV).

So Jacob prays. What are the important parts of his prayer? Genesis 32:9-12. What was he praying for? What promises was he claiming? How did his prayer show that he depended on God?

Jacob's prayer was sincere and heartfelt. But Jacob was also going to use some kind words and wisdom (Genesis 32:13-21). He had hoped that with all his gifts, he could make his brother feel better (Genesis 32:20). Perhaps the lesson here is: Sure, we need to pray. We need to depend on God. But at the same time, we need to do all we can within

God's will to see that the prayer is answered.

Read Genesis 33. What can we see in the relationship between Jacob and Esau to show they had changed?

No matter what spiritual growth Jacob and Esau had experienced over the years, time also heals wounds. What can you do to help reduce whatever pain you might be feeling over past wrongs while waiting for time to heal your wounds?

THURSDAY—DECEMBER 14

FIGHTING AND FAITH (Genesis 32:23-32)

What does the story in Genesis 32:23-32 say to you? What can you learn from this story about your own “struggles” with God? Also read Hosea 12:4.

Ellen White is clear that Jacob was wrestling with Christ, the “‘Angel of the covenant.’”⁶—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 197. No wonder that two times during the night of wrestling the verses say that it was really God who had appeared to Jacob. Here again, we see just how up close and personal God is willing to get with His people.

Why is Jacob's name change so important?

Jacob saw that he had struggled with God. So he pleaded for a blessing (Genesis 32:26). God rewarded his faith by changing his name. No more would his name be Jacob (“to seize the heel,” “to overreach” or “to deceive”). Now he would be called Israel (“he strives [works hard] with God”).



Jacob saw God face to face.

What meaning can you get from Jacob's words in Genesis 32:30?

When the struggle was over, Jacob said he had seen God's face and lived. In a way, this is the same opportunity offered to all people through the death of Jesus. Jesus was God in human form. Through His life and death as our Substitute,⁷ He brought reconciliation⁸ between heaven and

⁶covenant—a promise or agreement between God and His people.

⁷substitute—someone who takes another person's place. Jesus is our Substitute because He died for our sins.

⁸reconciliation—having a relationship with God again.

earth. Because of Jesus and what He has done, we all can “see the face of God” and live. Our past sins do not have to destroy us before the face of Him who is “a consuming [destroying] fire” (Hebrews 12:29).

How have you been striving (struggling) with God? What does it mean to strive (struggle) with God? Might you even come away from such striving, like Jacob, with a “limp”?

FRIDAY—DECEMBER 15

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 190–203; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, comments on Genesis 29:31–35:29.

“Jacob had left Padan-aram in obedience to God’s leading. But it was not without many fears and doubts that he followed the road he had walked as an escapee twenty years before. Jacob always remembered his sin in deceiving his father. He knew that his long exile⁹ was the direct result of that sin. He thought about these things day and night. Jacob’s conscience¹⁰ made his journey very sad. As the hills of Jacob’s own land appeared before him in the distance, his heart was deeply moved. All the past became

very clear to him. With the memory of Jacob’s sin came the thought of God’s favor toward him, and the promises of His help and leading.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 195.



Jacob and Esau would soon meet.

“Jacob had received the blessing for which his soul had hungered. God had pardoned his sin as a deceiver. The crisis in his life was past. Doubt, struggles, and sorrow had made Jacob’s life bitter. But now all was changed. Sweet was the peace of reunion with God. Jacob was no longer afraid to meet his brother. God, who had forgiven Jacob’s sin, could move Esau’s heart to humbly accept Jacob’s humiliation and repentance.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 198.

⁹exile—being forced to live away from home.

¹⁰conscience—a knowledge or sense of right and wrong with an urge to do right; moral judgment.



Jacob and Esau meet again.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ As a class, discuss Jacob's actions in preparing to meet Esau. Why did Jacob work so hard to try to soften his brother's anger? Did God's promises not give him enough faith? Was Jacob showing a lack of faith by his actions? Or were his actions proof of his faith?

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