

JACOB'S STORY: FROM DECEIVER TO PATRIARCH Genesis 25-46



The purpose of this study is to show God's love, patience, and promise keeping. It demonstrates how God can make a mercurial character such as Jacob into a patriarch, a man who played a leading role in the story of God's chosen people. God not only changed his name but gave him the opportunity to change his ways. It is a story that gives each one of us hope. Not one of us, whatever we have done wrong in our past, is beyond the grace and forgiveness of God.

WEEK FIVE - WRESTLING WITH GOD AND BEING GIVEN A NEW NAME

Read: Genesis 32:22-32 and 33

It has been described as the strangest wrestling match in history. Remember the setting: Jacob has sent two parties of servants with goods for Esau, telling them to leave a gap between them, in the hope that when Esau saw the second gift, he would be more amenable to Jacob. Late that night he took his wives, two female servants and his eleven sons over the ford of Jabbok.

Now God had previously spoken to Jacob in a variety of ways, but this was to be the defining moment of Jacob's life. That night God in the form of a man, physically wrestled with Jacob. No nice comforting words or promises but a night of struggle. It doesn't say that either won, but that the man did not prevail against Jacob but hit the socket of his hip and knocked it out of joint. He asked Jacob his name but told him he would no longer be known as Jacob but Israel, which means *Prince of God or Struggle with God*, because he had struggled with both God and men and have won.

- What did Jacob name the place? Why did he choose this name?
- When the sun rose, how was Jacob physically affected.

In Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet*, she asks the question: *What's in a name?* In many cultures, children are given names with specific meanings in the hope that they would become as that name. In Isaiah 49:16 we read that God has written, or inscribed, our names on the palms of his hands. Perhaps an indication of how close

he wishes to hold us and how precious we are to him. We sing that lovely song, *“What a beautiful name ... the name of Jesus.”* It is the name above every other name.

Read chapter 33

I find it interesting, that God had Jacob meet with Esau after a night without sleep and much physical exertion. He would have realised that everything that happened that day was all to do with God and nothing of him.

- Have you ever experienced being completely dependent on God, having no physical or spiritual strength to bring to a situation?
- Esau was coming to meet Jacob with 400 men, whereas Jacob had his family and servants. Had there been any fighting, it would have been Esau that would have prevailed.
- *Romans 8:31* tells us that, *“If God is for us, no man can stand against us”*. Be encouraged by that verse and think about it

I think, if you read between the lines, both Esau and Jacob were sounding each other out and weighing up the others worth. There was some negotiation, as Jacob persuaded Esau to accept the gifts he had brought. I'm sure you've seen or been a part of that kind of situation.

- In some versions of this chapter, verse 11 reads: *“Please, take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.”* I wonder if Jacob said those words spontaneously or whether he was harping back to the past when he had stolen Esau's paternal blessing?
- Do you think, reading verses 12-17, that there was still an element of mistrust between the brothers?
- Clearly, Jacob wanted to maintain some distance from Esau, so he moved in a westerly direction across the Jordan River and settled in Canaan. Notice that he refused to have any of Esau's men left with him.
- What place had Jacob promised God that he would return to?
- Jacob had met Esau in fear and trembling but when all went well, he forgot his promise.
- Has this happened in our lives? Remember in the last study we looked at the importance of keeping our promises. We should keep them to one another just as we should keep them to God. Integrity is so important if we want to show

others what it means to be a Christian. We should live out the Christian message each day.

Genesis 35

Despite all that God had done for Jacob and his family, there were many things in their household such as foreign idols, that needed to be let go. In this chapter we read how eventually, Jacob returned to Bethel, and built an altar there. It was from that point onwards, that God said he must no longer be known as Jacob (the deceiver) but Israel, a Prince of God.

Read the promises of God to him in verses 11-12 and how Jacob again set up a pillar of stone and poured a drink offering and oil over it .

God kept his promises to Jacob as we shall see in our last study. He will keep his promises to each of us, but we must be obedient and follow in his ways.



Prayer:

Father God, thank you for your promises to us. Thank you for you word and may we constantly remind ourselves and each other of the good things you have done for us.