

STORY

Jacob returns to Canaan - Genesis Chapters 32, 33 & 35

TEACHER PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, I know that You care for me better than I could ever care for myself, for You alone know what is best for me. I ask You now to give me the ability to teach this truth to my students and to create in their hearts an unshakable confidence in You as their Protector and Provider. Grant that through the teaching of this lesson they might come to realize that just as You were with Jacob and brought him safely through many adversities, so You will always protect and provide for each one of Your children. Bless my presentation of this truth, in Jesus' Name I ask. Amen.

VOCABULARY

Edom - means "red"; a name given both to Esau and to the country he inhabited. Esau was called "red" both because he was covered with reddish hair and because he sold his birthright for some red stew. The land known as Edom (also called *Idumea*) is so named for its unusual red sandstone formations. It is located southeast of Israel.

Sojourn - to stay as a temporary resident

Staff - a walking stick used in the Middle East for shepherding and for defense

Appease - to calm or pacify; to bring to a state of peace

Ford of the Jabbok - a popular point at which to cross the Jabbok River. The Jabbok winds some 60 miles through the country east of the Jordan River and eventually empties into the Jordan about halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea.

Socket of the hip - the area disabled on Jacob - either the joint of the hip itself, the sciatic muscle located near the hip, or the corresponding tendons in that area.

Israel - Name given to Jacob and later to all of his descendants. It is variously translated as "*struggles with God*," "*having power with God*," "*God's fighter*," "*ruling with God*," and "*prince with God*."

Succoth - means "booths." A city east of Shechem and the Jordan River and north of the Jabbok. So named because Jacob erected booths for his animals there. Later also the site of Solomon's copper mining and smelting operations. (Not to be confused with the Succoth near Egypt where the Israelites camped the first night after the Exodus.)

Terebinth tree - a small tree of the sumac family, known for producing turpentine.

OUTER AIM

Jacob returns to Canaan and is reunited with his brother Esau.

INNER AIM

God makes Jacob realize that it is He who has preserved and blessed him.

BACKGROUND

When Rebekah first sent Jacob to Laban, she told him to remain there until she sent for him (Genesis 27:45). Jacob is now returning without having received word from his mother and is therefore uncertain and fearful of how his brother Esau might receive him. Scheming and manipulating have been part of his entire life and he is afraid the sins of his past are about to catch up with him. With this



Story Name

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Teacher's Notes

fear in his heart he prepares to meet Esau, the twin brother he had once cheated and exploited.

Chapter 32

- Jacob has had many years to contemplate how he might appease his brother. As always he comes to rely on subtle scheming, resolving first to send messengers ahead to test the waters and prepare Esau for his arrival. In a subtle way he seeks to let Esau know that he is not powerless against an attack, instructing his messengers to tell Esau that he has male and female servants. He also calls Esau "lord" and himself "your servant Jacob." His words intend to indicate strength, but humble submission and non-aggression.
- Jacob expected his messengers to be gone many days, for the trip to Esau's home was long. He was terrified when they returned well before the appointed time to tell him that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men. His first reaction was to plan and scheme, dividing his possessions and family into two camps. He must have quickly recognized the futility of the move, and for the first time (recorded) since leaving his homeland he approaches God in prayer. In that prayer he holds God to the promise He had made to him.
- Although his prayer certainly was heartfelt and genuine, Jacob still cannot resist the temptation to take matters into his own hands and seek to finesse. He sends herd upon herd and flock upon flock ahead of him in an attempt to pacify his brother. He strategically spaces each herd and flock to multiply the effect in Esau's eyes, again instructing his messengers to call Jacob "servant" and Esau "lord."
- The account of the wrestling with "a Man" is difficult to fully comprehend and has been explained in many different ways. Jacob obviously believed that the man with whom he wrestled was God in human form. We have no reason to doubt that it was. Luther said that God probably shrouded the event in mystery because mystery invites further reflection. The best explanation is that God wanted to teach Jacob a valuable lesson. Jacob had been "wrestling" his entire life. God here demonstrated that wrestling *against* God is futile. Man cannot prevail *against* God, but can only succeed *with* God.
- The fact that "the Man saw that he did not prevail" is not a sign of God's lack of power. Instead God came in a form that could be challenged, but demonstrated his power by a single touch. This was all a sign that God has bound himself to be affected by the faithful who wrestle with Him in prayer. He draws a distinction between the physical and spiritual by ending the physical struggle with a touch that dislocated Jacob's hip. Perhaps also the muscle was permanently affected, leaving Jacob with a reminder that his struggle is with God and can be successful only through faith and prayer. No man by force of his own will or strength can oppose God. This lesson Jacob needed to learn. God held his future in his hands.
- The "man" renames Jacob to Israel (see note above), yet he will not tell Jacob his name. This, to Luther, further deepens the mystery and invites our continued contemplation. Some suggest that "the Man" thus indicates that Jacob should have already known who He was from what He had said and done.
- The limp remains as a reminder, at least for a time. We don't know for how long.

Chapter 33

- Again Jacob demonstrates his shameless favoritism by ranking his children according to his affection - the least favorable placed forward in the greatest danger. Certainly his conduct must have had a profound effect on the less favored women and children and may well have contributed to future jealousies and the resultant selling and enslavement of Joseph.
- Jacob demonstrated rare courage and forthrightness by going on ahead of the women and children to meet Esau alone. He demonstrates his utter humility in Oriental fashion by bowing seven times to the ground, but Esau had been blessed by God and demonstrates no ill will

whatsoever toward the brother. All Jacob's scheming and his lavish gifts had been unnecessary. God had been at work in Esau's heart. Note that though Jacob called Esau "lord," Esau called Jacob "brother."

- Whether out of guilt or joy, or perhaps as an attempt to prevent Esau from changing his mind and making a claim against him in the future, Jacob insisted that Esau accept the lavish gift offered to him. What he gave to him was something of a fortune, perhaps a payment for the blessing and birthright he had stolen and extorted.
- Jacob still did not trust Esau and again demonstrated some of his old scheming. He refused to travel with Esau (using the excuse that Esau would travel too fast for the young ones) and urged him to go on ahead. He even refused Esau's offer of some of his armed men as an escort, indicating that Jacob probably had no intention of ever going to Esau's homeland, Seir. Finally Jacob lied to his brother, promising that he would come to him in Seir. Instead he traveled in almost the opposite direction and lived for a time in Succoth—a makeshift town of booths he built east of the Jordan.
- Some time later Jacob crossed the Jordan River and settled near Shechem in Canaan. There he bought a parcel of land and erected an altar there. He called the place, literally translated, "*God, the God of Israel.*" This is the first indication in the Bible where Jacob referred to God as *his* God. Prior to this time he had always referred to Him as the God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac.

Chapter 35

- After the incident with Dinah and Shechem, Jacob was told by God to move to Bethel (where Jacob first saw God when he fled from Esau). This Jacob did, but why he moved from Bethel, where God had told to live, and settled in Ephrath (Bethlehem) is not known.
- Before he made the trip to Bethel, Jacob commanded that all idols be put away and that his household purify both their bodies and their clothes. A significant spiritual change had obviously come over Jacob. Why he had allowed the foreign gods up until this point is not known. Certainly from this point on, however, the God of his fathers is now also *his* God.
- God appeared to Jacob yet again in Bethel and renewed the promise He had made to Abraham and Isaac. There God promised Jacob that "kings would come from his body." The greatest king, of course, was the King of kings and Lord of lords - our Savior Jesus Christ, who was born of the Tribe of Judah.
- In Verse 13 we read that "*God went up from him in the place where He talked with him.*" This was in keeping with God's original promise to Jacob in Genesis 28:15, "*I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.*" Though God surely kept watch over Jacob in the years to come, we have no other record that he ever appeared to him as He had done at Bethel and at the Ford of the Jabbok.
- Jacob's beloved Rachel died in childbirth near Bethlehem and was buried there. In death she gave birth to Jacob's final son, Benjamin.
- By sleeping with Jacob's concubine, Reuben was attempting to lay premature claim to his inheritance as firstborn. This was an insolent, prideful sin and it later cost Reuben his rights as firstborn (cf. Genesis 49:3-4).
- Good and faithful Isaac was reunited with his son Jacob before he died. Isaac lived 180 years and was buried by his sons, Jacob and Esau. It is not known if Jacob and Esau kept in contact, other than when they buried their father Isaac. Though Esau's descendants bore hostility toward the Children of Israel, we have no record that Esau himself held a grudge toward his brother.

STUDENT PRAYER

Dear Jesus, whenever I am tempted to put my trust in myself remind me always to put my trust in You. Let me never forget that You are my strength and that You are always with me and will never leave me. Apart from You I can accomplish no good thing. Strengthen the faith with which You have blessed me and help me to always trust in You as my Savior and Provider. In Jesus Name I ask this. Amen.

PRESENTATION

This account is much too long to read in class. It would be wise to assign the reading of this section to the older students a week ahead of time. Parents should also be encouraged to read these chapters to the younger children during the week prior. During class-time tell the story in your own words, making notes of the special points you want to be sure to include. It might be easiest to skip any mention of Chapter 34, as well as 35:22.

APPLICATIONS

1. All of man's scheming and planning will always come to naught unless the Lord is working for us. Make the student see that Jacob was only successful because God had determined that he should be successful. Above all stress the role Jacob played in God's master plan for our salvation. God preserved and blessed Jacob because He had promised to send the Promised Savior through the family of Jacob's son, Judah. Note how long-suffering and patient God was with Jacob because of His promise.
2. It is a mistake to try to justify the conduct of Jacob. Jacob was often a deceitful manipulator. It is to God's praise and glory that He makes use of such raw human material to accomplish His goals. It should be a great comfort to each of us to know that God does not cast us away because of our weakness and sin. Have the students list examples both of how they have sinned and also of how God has nevertheless blessed them day by day. We are no better than Jacob.
3. God surely wants us to work, and work hard, but lead the children to see that it is God, not our own strength and intelligence, Who provides all that we have.
4. Jacob's hip reminds us that God sometimes leaves us with painful reminders of lessons He wants us to remember. Have the children think of examples (e.g., someone who drinks and drives may sustain permanent injuries in a crash, etc.).
5. God wants us to "wrestle" with Him in prayer and, like Jacob, will bless us for it.
6. The effect of sins often lives on for many years. Note how the sins Jacob committed against his brother Esau came back to haunt him after many years had passed. In the same way the pain and sorrow we cause by our words and actions today can linger in the hearts and lives of our neighbor for many years.

PASSAGES

These passages can be assigned as memory work or simply discussed in class as to how they fit the lesson.

Lower

Matthew 6:11 - *Give us this day our daily bread.*

1 Peter 5:7 - *Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.*

Psalms 37:5 - *Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.*

Psalms 50:15 - *Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.*

Middle any of the above and...

Philippians 4:19 - *And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

Psalms 145:15 - *The eyes of all look expectantly to You, And You give them their food in due season.*

Psalms 33:18 - *Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, On those who hope in His mercy.*

Psalms 37:5 - *Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.*

Upper any of the above and...

Psalms 121:1-2 - *I will lift up my eyes to the hills; From whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.*

Psalms 18:2 - *The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.*

James 1:17 - *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.*

HYMN CHOICES

"All Depends On Our Possessing" TLH #425:1 & 5

"I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus" TLH #428:1, 4, 6

"Jesus, My Truth, My Way" TLH #433:1, 4-6