

# JACOB RETURNED TO CANAAN

Genesis 31:1 - 35:29

## STRUCTURE

**Key-persons:** Jacob and Esau

**Key-location:** Canaan

### Key-repetitions:

- Jacob manifested terror: by fleeing from Laban (Gen 31:17-21); Jacob was terrified when he heard Esau was coming with 400 armed men (Gen 32:7); Jacob prayed and told God of his fear that Esau would kill them all (Gen 32:11); Jacob sent gifts to Esau, hoping to pacify him (Gen 32:20); Jacob sent everyone across the river and he stayed alone (Gen 32:24); Jacob bowed down seven times as he walked toward Esau (Gen 33:3).
- Worship/altar: Jacob was terrified of Esau and prayed to God (Gen 32:3-13); Jacob went to Shechem and set up an altar (Gen 34:17-20); Jacob returned to Bethel, got rid of foreign gods and built an altar to God (Gen 35:2-4).

### Key-attitudes:

- Jacob's terror of Esau.
- Jacob's persistence in wrestling God in the form of a man.
- Esau's joy at encountering Jacob.
- Jacob's worship of God.

### Initial-situation:

After spending twenty years with his Uncle Laban, Jacob had two wives, two concubines, eleven sons, one daughter, large flocks, and many servants.

### Initial-problem:

Laban's sons accused Jacob of gaining wealth at their father's expense.

### Final-situation:

God confirmed that Jacob's name was changed to Israel. God also confirmed that the land he promised to Abraham and Isaac would be given to Jacob and would be passed onto his descendants.

## BIBLE STORY

### Jacob Fleeing from Laban

Laban's sons accused Jacob of gaining wealth at their father's expense. After spending twenty years with Laban, Jacob fled, returning to Canaan with two wives, two concubines, eleven sons, one daughter, large flocks of sheep, servants, camels, and donkeys (Gen 30:25 - 31:16).

Jacob sent messengers to his brother Esau. The messengers reported Esau was coming with 400 armed men.

Jacob was terrified. He divided his flocks, herds, camels and people into two camps. He thought, "If Esau attacks one group, the group that is left may escape."

Jacob prayed, "God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac! Lord, you told me, 'Return to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper.' I'm unworthy of all the kindness and goodness you've shown me. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I own enough to have two camps. Save me from my angry brother Esau. I'm afraid he'll kill us all: me, the mothers, and their children. But you said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants as numerous as the sand of the sea'" (Gen 32:3-13).

Jacob spent the night there. Jacob selected a gift for his brother Esau: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. Jacob put them in the care of his servants and told his servants, "Go ahead of me. My brother Esau will meet you and ask, 'Whose servant are you. Whose animals are these?' You are to answer, 'They belong to your servant Jacob. He sent them to you, my master Esau, and he's coming behind us.'" Jacob thought, "I'll pacify him with these gifts I'm sending on ahead; later, when I see him face to face, perhaps he will welcome me" (Gen 32:14-21).

Jacob sent his gifts on ahead, but he himself spent the night in the camp. Jacob took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven sons and crossed at the shallow waters of the Jabbok River. Jacob sent them across, then he sent over his possessions.

Jacob stayed behind alone. A man wrestled with Jacob till daybreak. The man saw that he could not overpower Jacob and he struck Jacob's hip and put it out of joint. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I'll not let you go unless you bless me."

The man asked him, "What is your name?"

He answered, "Jacob."

Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you wrestled with God and with men and won." Then the man blessed Jacob.

Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "I saw God face to face. But, my life was spared."

The sun rose as Jacob left Peniel. Jacob was limping because of his hip (Gen 32:22-31).

### **Jacob Returns to Canaan**

Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming with his four hundred men. Jacob divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maids. Jacob put the maids and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. Jacob went out front and bowed down to the ground seven times as he walked toward his brother Esau.

Esau ran to meet Jacob, hugged him and kissed him. They both wept. Esau looked up, saw the women and children, and asked, "Who are these with you?"

Jacob answered, "They are the children God graciously gave your servant."

The women and their children approached Esau and bowed down.

Esau asked, "What do you mean by all these herds I met?"

Jacob answered, "They were to please you, my master."

Esau replied, "I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself."

Jacob replied, "No, please! If you can find it in your heart to welcome me, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God smiling on me. Please accept the present that was brought to you." Because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted the gifts.

Then Esau said, "Let us be on our way; I'll travel with you."

Jacob replied, "The children are weak. The flocks and herds are nursing, making for slow going. If they're driven hard just one day, all the animals will die. My master, go on ahead of me, your servant. I'll let the animals and the children set the speed for us to travel. I will come to my master in Seir."

Esau started back to Seir (Gen 33:1-16).

Jacob, however, went in another direction. Jacob pitched his tent at the city of Shechem in Canaan and he set up an altar (Gen 34:17-20).

God told Jacob to return to Bethel. Jacob told his household to get rid of foreign gods. Jacob built an altar to God. At Bethel, God appeared to Jacob, blessed him, and again gave him the name Israel. God promised that nations and kings would come from Israel. God promised to give Jacob and his descendants the land pledged to Abraham and Isaac. Jacob set up a stone pillar (Gen 35:1-15).

They left Bethel and Jacob's wife Rachel died giving birth to her second son, Benjamin (Gen 35:9-20).

Jacob had twelve sons:

- Sons of Leah: Reuben the firstborn, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.
- Sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.
- Sons of Rachel's maid Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali.
- Sons of Leah's maid Zilpah: Gad and Asher (Gen 35:21-26).

### GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

## SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What kind of experience did Jacob have the night before his reunion with Esau?
2. What happened when Esau met up with his brother Jacob?
3. How was the Jacob who returned to Canaan different from the one who left?
4. How did God fulfill his promises to Jacob?
5. Why did Jacob not deserve the blessings he received from God?
6. How has God blessed us in ways we don't deserve?
7. What kinds of broken relationships do we have in our families that we have a need to resolve?

## LIFE-LESSONS

1. **The person who is aware of both the extent of his needs and his own weaknesses is in a condition to experience God's power.** Jacob knew Esau was coming with 400 men. Jacob feared Esau's violent anger; Jacob knew his own inability to do battle with Esau, and Jacob knew he needed protection. Only then did he voluntarily surrender to God with mind, body, and spirit (Gen 32:22-29).
2. **True prayer comes from a person who knows the greatness of God, his own weakness and misconduct, and is aware that he is totally dependent upon God for the solution of his needs.** In his prayer, Jacob (Gen 32:9-12) recognized divine initiative in manifesting grace to his father and to himself (Gen 32:9). He recognized his own failure and recognized God as the source of everything good and perfect (Gen 32:10). He recognized his need for God to protect him (Gen 32:11). He recognized that he could trust God to do what God had promised (Gen 32:12).
3. **A person is transformed when he has an experience with God.** Jacob's name was changed to Israel, and he was transformed into a different person (Gen 32:28). He stopped being the deceiver who cunningly took advantage of others. He became a person dependent on divine guidance. He stopped being the cowardly, frightened man. He became one who was able to face the future with confidence. He stopped being the man who cunningly took from his brother. He sought peace by giving Esau presents (Gen 33:8-11).
4. **God can choose a person with undesirable characteristics and use divine discipline to turn him into someone useful.** In the first phase of his life, Jacob deceitfully took advantage of others. God had promised Jacob blessings as a result of the covenant established with Abraham; however, Jacob used deceit to obtain things God had promised him. Through divine discipline, God changed Jacob's name to Israel, and he changed Jacob's character.

5. **People don't deserve the blessings and privileges that they receive from God.** Jacob's heart was not directed toward God; however, God's heart was directed toward Jacob. Jacob the deceiver didn't deserve God's blessing that was first given to Abraham, then passed onto Isaac, and then transmitted to him (Gen 28:1-4; 32:9-12).

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### Interactive Sharing:

Jacob had a broken relationship with his brother after deceiving his father, in order to steal his brother's promised blessing. The broken relationship was finally resolved.

- Invite listeners to share similar experiences where they were able to resolve broken relationships.
- Invite listeners with broken relationships to get in the center of a circle. Others gather around and pray that those inside the circle will discover God's plan for resolving the broken relationships.