



LESSON 14

Jacob wrestles with God

GENESIS 32:1-33:20



God's children depend fully upon Him.



“And he said to him, ‘What is your name?’ And he said, ‘Jacob.’ Then he said, ‘Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.’” (Gen 32:27–28).

Supporting Truths

1. God blesses those who cling to Him.
2. By clinging to God, we make God our own God.
3. Those who are self sufficient, deceptive, and manipulative don't cling to God.
4. God fights against the self-reliant.
5. Those who cling to God will worship Him.

Objectives

1. Describe how God answered Jacob's prayer.
2. Identify when Jacob called God "his God".
3. Describe how Jacob trusted in himself before wrestling with God.
4. Explain how God brought trouble into Jacob's life and finally broke his power.
5. Describe how Jacob worshiped God after being driven to him.

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

Jacob wrestles with God • Genesis 32:1–33:20



Lesson Summary

Jacob was returning to Canaan when he heard that his brother Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men. Jacob's fear drove him to pray, but even though he asked God for deliverance, Jacob continued to trust in his own strength and resources. The night before Jacob met Esau, God came and wrestled with Jacob, shattering Jacob's self sufficiency and driving him to dependence on Him. After Jacob admitted his deceitful nature, God blessed him, gave him a new name, saved him from Esau, and brought him into Canaan. There for the first time Jacob worshiped God as his own God.

Spotlight on the Gospel

Jacob, the proud, self sufficient, trickster, had to embrace humble dependence on God before returning to the land of Canaan. His wrestling match with God illustrates the way a person must cling to God in order to receive His blessing. God saves those who do not let go of Him (Deut 4:4), desperately holding fast to the promise of salvation through God's Son, Jesus. Jacob's clinging to God is a vivid expression of man's humility and his total dependence on God for everything.

LAST WEEK



**God chooses Jacob
over Esau**
*Genesis 25:21–24;
27:1–28:5*

THIS WEEK



**Jacob wrestles
with God**
Genesis 32:1–33:20

NEXT WEEK



God preserves Joseph
Genesis 37:1–36

PROMISE

Lesson Commentary

God's children depend fully upon Him.

God chose Jacob to be the one to carry on God's promise to make Abraham a great nation and bless all nations through Abraham (Gen 12:2–3; 25:23). However, even though Jacob valued the birthright and blessing, God was not his God. Jacob relied on himself. If any man could be self-reliant, Jacob could. By his cleverness he had gotten his way against Esau, Isaac, and even Laban. By his strength he had rolled away a stone that normally took several men to move, and even when almost 100 years old he could wrestle all night. But even after his fourteen year struggle with Laban (29:13–31:55), Jacob still had not learned that it is God, not man, who brings success. Jacob still would not call God “my God.” He referred to God only as the God of Abraham and Isaac (31:5, 42, 53). Jacob still trusted his own strength and cleverness instead of surrendering control of his life to God. But before returning to his father's land in Canaan, Jacob struggled with a man—God Himself—who used Jacob's desperation to drive him to depend upon God, not self.

Jacob continued to cling to himself (32:1–21)

With his struggle with Laban behind him, Jacob went on his way (32:1). He was first met by an angelic host, who must have reminded him of Bethel, which would have been a timely reminder of God's will being done on earth (28:11–15). But then Jacob remembered his brother, Esau, a frightening reminder of sin's consequences (32:3).

Jacob sought reconciliation with his brother (32:4–5), but the report of the messengers (32:6) only seemed to confirm his deepest fears—Esau's 20 year-old promised to kill Jacob had not been forgotten (27:41). Esau's coming with 400 men appeared to spell disaster for Jacob and his family (32:8, 11). So Jacob divided his people and his possessions, hoping that if one half was destroyed the other half could escape.

Frightened concerning his impending reunion with Esau, Jacob prayed for deliverance. First he prayed

by faith in God's character as Yahweh, the covenant God who proved His love and faithfulness by His past actions (32:9–10). Second, both at the beginning and end of his prayer, he repeated God's promises back to God, showing that he prayed by faith in God's word and with a desire for God's will to be done (32:9, 12). Third, he confessed that he deserved none of God's kindness (32:10). Fourth, he presented his request, asking to be saved from Esau and praying for his family as well (32:11).

However, even though Jacob's prayer is commendable, he was still not ready to call God his own God (32:9). Jacob had not

yet given God complete control of his life. He did not fully rely upon God. He tried to appease his brother with 550 animals (32:13–21), showing his failure to believe that God would actually change Esau's heart. Jacob believed that he would be the one to change his brother's heart, for he said, “I will appease him with the present that goes before me” (32:20). Jacob was back to his old tricks, relying on himself and his own resources.

Jacob finally clung to God (32:22–32)

But God met Jacob. While Jacob was alone, seemingly out of nowhere, a man began wrestling with Jacob, and Jacob kept wrestling him all night (33:24). Hosea 12:3–4 shows that this man was both God and the angel of the Lord, an Old Testament appearance of God the Son. Hosea also shows that this wrestling match was not just physical, but also verbal and spiritual, for Jacob “wept and sought His favor” (Hos 12:4). So the wrestling match showed the reality of Jacob's life. He thought his struggles with Esau, Isaac, and Laban were struggles against men. But in reality, he had been resisting God.

Finally, the man dislocated Jacob's hip (33:25), which is the center of power in wrestling. This illustrates that God

THINK ABOUT IT
Jacob's prayer is a pattern for us to follow.



THINK ABOUT IT
Jacob turned from sinful self-reliance to submissive God-reliance.



STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

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finally broke Jacob's self reliance. In response, Jacob did what he should have been doing his whole life: he clung to God to receive the blessing (33:26). Before blessing him, the man first asked Jacob his name (33:27). The last time Genesis records someone asking Jacob his name, Jacob had lied and said his name was Esau (27:19). But this time Jacob told the truth. He finally realized

and admitted that he really was what his name means—a deceiver.

After Jacob's confession, the man renamed him Israel, which means "he struggles with God" (32:28). By renaming him, the man declared Jacob to be a changed man. It is here, clinging to God, that Jacob finally humbled himself and surrendered control of his life. So this wrestling match illustrates that a person is to cling to God by faith to seek His favor (Deut 4:4), and that God will graciously fight against us until we cling to Him for salvation.

The man blessed Jacob, implying that He was God. Jacob recognized this when he named the place Peniel, which means "face of God" (32:29–30). Jacob said, "I have seen God face to face" (32:30), identifying his unusual, personal encounter with God. But, as it was not light yet, Jacob did not actually see God's face. A few others, like Manoah (Judg 13:22), had such an encounter, and Moses regularly encountered God in such a direct way (Exod 33:11), yet without literally seeing God (Exod 33:20).

Just as Jacob's wrestling match was a physical expression of spiritually clinging to God, so his limp as he went away was a physical illustration of his spiritual humbling

(Gen 32:31). He was not perfect, but he was no longer determined to rely on his own strength instead of on God. It was not until Jacob saw his need for God's blessing that he was ready to receive and enjoy God's blessing.

Jacob worshiped God as his own God (33:1–20)

God was true to His promise to bring Jacob safely back into the land. God had caused a change in Esau's heart, so that instead of killing Jacob, Esau ran to Jacob, embraced him, and wept with him (33:4). Jacob insisted that Esau take his generous gift (33:11), for by accepting it, Esau agreed that he had received payment for any wrong Jacob had done to him. He gave up his right to take vengeance on Jacob.

After Esau left, Jacob traveled slowly until he came to Shechem in Canaan, the land God had promised to Jacob and his descendants (33:17–19). Here Jacob built an altar called El-Elohe-Israel, "Mighty God is the God of Israel" (33:20). Since Jacob's new name was "Israel," he was now referring to God as his own God. God had promised to give him success and bring him back into the land. Jacob remembered God's promise and would not stop clinging to this promise, for now he was clinging to God. So now, after wrestling with God, Jacob **worshiped** God as his own God, giving God the honor He deserves.

When Moses wrote this story, the people were about to reenter Canaan, so God's promise about the land was very meaningful to them. Like Jacob, they too needed to cling to God and depend upon Him for all their needs. And as Jacob entered the land after triumphing over the Aramean in the north (Laban) and the Edomite in the south (Esau), so the Israelites could hope to triumph over all their enemies and enter the land. Followers of God today must also cling to God and His promises, not to their own cleverness or strength, for God has provided a way for them to enter their heavenly home through Jesus Christ (Heb 11:16; 13:14–15).

Lesson Outline

God's children depend fully upon Him.

AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE



1. Jacob depended on himself (32:1–12).
2. Jacob depended on God (32:22–32).
3. Jacob worshiped God (33:1–20).

AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE



1. **Jacob continued to cling to himself (32:1–21).**
 - As Jacob returned to Canaan, angels reminded him of God's presence (32:1–2).
 - Jacob was afraid when he heard that Esau was coming with 400 men (32:3–8).
 - Jacob prayed, but he was still not ready to call God his own God (32:9–12).
 - Jacob still depended on himself when he sent a gift to Esau (32:13–21).
2. **Jacob finally clung to God (32:22–32).**
 - When Jacob was alone, a man wrestled with him all night (32:22–24).
 - Because Jacob kept resisting, the man dislocated his hip (32:25).
 - Jacob would not let go until the man blessed him (32:25–26).
- Jacob admitted his name was Jacob, or “deceiver” (32:27).
- The man blessed Jacob and named him Israel, or “he struggles with God” (32:28).
- Jacob knew the man was actually God (32:28–30).
3. **Jacob worshiped God as his own God (33:1–20).**
 - Esau welcomed Jacob peacefully (33:1–16).
 - Jacob traveled to Shechem in Canaan, the land promised to him by God (33:17–19).
 - Jacob built an altar and named it “a Mighty God is the God of Israel” (33:20).



Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

- 1. Why was Jacob afraid to see his brother Esau?**
Jacob was afraid Esau would kill him and his family.
- 2. When Jacob wrestled with God, did Jacob let go?**
No. Jacob kept holding on to God.
- 3. How did God teach Jacob to trust Him?**
God dislocated Jacob's hip so that Jacob limped.
- 4. What did Jacob do after God saved him from Esau?**
He built an altar and made God his own.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

- 1. Who did Jacob see before he sent messengers to Esau?**
Jacob saw angels of God, so Jacob remembered that God's will was being done on earth.
- 2. Why was Jacob so afraid of Esau?**
Esau had promised to kill him, and Jacob thought Esau would attack his family too.
- 3. How did Jacob pray?**
Jacob remembered God's loving and faithful character and actions, he prayed based on God's promises, he admitted he was unworthy, and he asked God a specific request.
- 4. What did Jacob do after he prayed?**
Jacob sent 550 animals to Esau and called Esau "my lord."
- 5. What did God do to Jacob before blessing him?**
God dislocated Jacob's hip so that Jacob limped. This is a reminder that we experience God's blessing only after we have become broken before God.
- 6. What did Jacob have to do before God blessed him?**
Jacob had to admit that his name was Jacob and that he was a deceiver. God blesses those who confess their sin and depend fully on Him.
- 7. What did God do for Jacob?**
God gave Jacob a new name, Israel. God blessed Jacob. God saved Jacob from Esau and brought him back into Canaan.
- 8. What did Jacob do after he got to Canaan?**
Jacob built an altar and worshiped God as his own God, not just as the God of his father.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



INTRODUCE

HAIRY-ARMED ESAU

Tape pieces of red yarn to your arms, neck, and face. As you are doing this, ask the children whether they remember the name of the hairy man in Genesis. When the children say, "Esau," ask whether they remember why Esau was mad at Jacob. Jacob put fur on his arms and pretended to be Esau. He stole the family blessing, and that made Esau very angry. Jacob was afraid to meet his brother, Esau, because Esau said he would kill Jacob.

DIVIDING YOUR POSSESSIONS

Use masking tape to make two large circles on the floor. At the beginning of the Bible lesson, read Genesis 32:6–8 to the class. Illustrate the idea of dividing the people and animals by dividing the children into two groups. Each group could sit in a separate circle for the rest of the lesson.



ILLUSTRATE

DEPENDING ON SELF OR GOD?

Tape pieces of red yarn to your arms. Tell the children that this is what Jacob did to trick his father. Ask the children if Jacob was depending on himself or God when he pretended to be Esau. Explain that Jacob was depending on himself, not God, when he tricked his father.

PRAYER: TALKING TO GOD

Show the children different ways we communicate with each other: Letters, emails (computers), phones, and walkie talkies. Ask the children if we need any of these things to talk to God. Tell the children that we don't need any of these things to talk to God. We can talk to God anytime. This is prayer: talking to God.



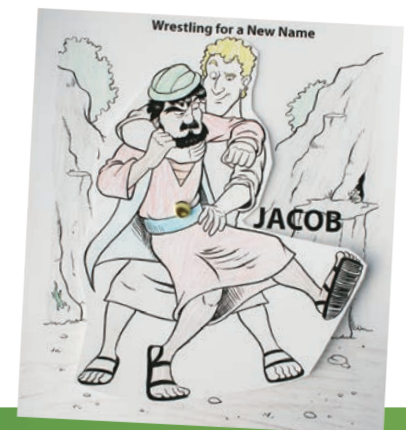
APPLY

ISRAEL/JACOB SPINNER

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1.

Materials: Craft pages, white cardstock, metal fasteners (brads), scissors, and crayons.

Directions: Cut out the picture of the men wrestling. Pass these out to children, along with one copy of the landscape on cardstock. Tell the children to color both the men and the landscape. After they have finished coloring, help the children fasten the wrestlers to the landscape by pushing the metal fastener (brad) through the wrestlers and landscape. Spin the wrestlers around in a circle to reveal Jacob's new name.



Israel/Jacob Spinner
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1

TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

Jacob wrestles with God • Genesis 32:1–33:20



AGES 6–8



INTRODUCE

A NEW NAME

As children enter the classroom, give them each a name tag with a new name written on it. Explain that in today's lesson, they will learn that Jacob received a new name after he wrestled with God.

DIVIDING YOUR POSSESSIONS

Divide the class into groups of 3-4 children, and ask each group to sit in a circle on the floor. Give each child 4 individually wrapped candies (like Starbursts). Tell the children to dump their possessions on the floor and divide them into two large piles in the center of their circle. Come around to each group, and select one of the two piles. Ask the children to pick up these possessions and take them away to the other side of the room, along with half of the group members. Use this activity to introduce the idea of Jacob dividing his family, servants, and possessions in Genesis 32:7 after hearing the news of Esau approaching with 400 men. Explain that Joseph divided his most precious belongings into two separate groups, in hopes that one would survive if Esau decided to attack them.



ILLUSTRATE

CROSSING THE RIVER

Place two ropes parallel on the floor, and ask the children to leap over the "river." Repeat, making the "river" a little wider each time. When the river is too wide to leap, place "stepping stones" (rugs or papers) between the two ropes, and have the children carefully step their way to the other side. In our story, Jacob took his family to safety across the river.

DO YOU DEPEND ON GOD OR YOURSELF?

Ask the children if the following actions demonstrate dependence on self or dependence on God: (1) lying (self), (2) telling truth (God), (3) stealing (self), (4) waiting your turn (God), (5) tricking someone (self), and (6) helping someone (God).



APPLY

JACOB'S GIFT

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1.

Materials: Cardstock, glue or tape, scissors, crayons, and bows.

Directions: Copy both craft pages on cardstock. Tell the children to color the cube pattern and animals. Then have the children cut out the cube pattern and animals. Help the children construct the cube, using glue or tape to secure the sides and bottom. Leave the top open so the gift may be opened and closed. Place a small bow on top of the gift and place the animals inside the gift.

*Jacob's Gift
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1*



AGES 9–11



INTRODUCE

FEARS

Talk about things that may cause us to be afraid, and discuss why each of these things causes fear. Have you ever been afraid of someone? Why? What happened when you confronted that person?

WHISPER A MESSAGE

Divide the class into two teams, the “Jacobs” and the “Esaus.” They could be identified by different colored strips of fabric used as arm bands. To the first child on the Jacob team, whisper, “Your servant is coming back.” Whisper to the first Esau, “I am coming to meet you.” Those first two children should whisper their messages to the next people in line on their teams, who then pass the message along. It will be fun to hear the messages from the last children in both lines. You could begin the game with other messages and end with those just given. Other messages might be, “It is a great day to learn God’s Word” or “Hi. I am glad you came to Sunday School today.”



ILLUSTRATE

RELYING ON SELF

Before his wrestling match, Jacob relied upon his own strength and resources. Use the following examples from Jacob’s life to illustrate his dependence upon himself: (1) He used Esau’s hunger to obtain the birthright (Gen 25:29–34); (2) He stole the blessing (Gen 27:18–19, 24); He deceived Laban when he fled (Gen 31:20).

CLINGING TO GOD

Jacob persevered in prayer. That means that he didn’t give up. He wrestled all night, refusing to let go until he received a blessing. Ask for volunteers who think they can persevere the longest. After a few volunteers have come up to the front, ask them all to get into a push-up position using their arms to keep their bodies off the ground. See which child can persevere in this position the longest before giving up and lying on the ground.



APPLY

“A CHANGED MAN”

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1.

Give each child a copy of the “A Changed Man” work sheet. Fill in the blanks to complete each statement. Write the first letter of each answer on the blanks in the bottom right corner, and unscramble the letters to discover Jacob’s new name. Read Jacob’s prayer from Genesis 32:9–12. Beside each verse, tell what it shows about Jacob’s changed heart.