

Osaka International Church
Date: August 10th, 2008
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Series: Patriarchs
Title: Jacob Becomes Israel
Scripture: Genesis 28-33
Key Verse: Genesis 32:28

I. Introduction

Good morning! Last week we talked about Jacob and we saw that although he was a deceiver, he was also a believer in the promises of God. One thing we talked about was how he deceived his father in order to steal his brother Esau's blessing. Well, after this Esau was so furious that he planned to kill Jacob. But Rebekah heard of Esau's plan and told Jacob to flee to her brother's home in the old country. Isaac blessed Jacob and Jacob was sent away to Laban, with instructions to find a wife there and to stay until Esau had time to get over his anger. Through deceit, Jacob had obtained the blessing of the firstborn, but now Jacob had to run away with only his staff and the clothes on his back.



One night Jacob slept at a certain place. He had no pillow, so he laid his head down on a stone. And the Lord sent him a dream. **Genesis 28:12** tells us, **“He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.”** Here is Noelle's painting of the angels on the stairway. In the dream, the Lord promised to bring Jacob back to the Promised Land, to give Jacob the land and many descendants, and to bless all the peoples of the earth through Jacob. This promise was very similar to the promises God had given to Abraham and to Isaac.



The next morning Jacob arose and worshipped God. Then he named the place, “Bethel,” the house of God. **Genesis 28:20-22** tell us, **“Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the Lord will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.””**

And so, Jacob went to Haran where he worked for his Uncle Laban as a shepherd for twenty years. In Haran, Jacob fell in love with Laban's daughter, Rachel, and he worked seven years to get her. But on the night of the wedding Laban deceived Jacob and gave him Rachel's older sister, Leah, instead. Then, Laban made Jacob work seven more years to marry Rachel as his second wife. After Jacob worked 14 years to get Laban's daughters, he also worked six more years for wages of herds of animals. During this time Jacob became rich even though Laban kept changing his wages.



By the way, how many people have watched some of the Beijing Olympics? Well, Leah and Rachel had their own competition, a competition to have as many sons as possible, a sort of, “baby Olympics.” As a result of the competition, at the end of chapter 30 Jacob has eleven sons by four ladies, Leah and Rachel, plus their maidservants, Zilpah and Bilhah.



During the twenty years that he spent with Laban, Jacob learned many lessons. He learned what it was like to live in the field and watch over the sheep. He learned what it felt like to be manipulated and deceived by others. And I think that Jacob also learned a more positive lesson; during twenty years as a shepherd, Jacob learned how to wait on the Lord.

Genesis 31:3, **“Then the Lord said to Jacob, “Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.””** And Jacob gathered his wives and children and took his flocks and his

servants and departed to return to the Promised Land. Because Jacob left without telling Laban, Laban became angry and came after Jacob with armed men and overtook him. Also, although Jacob did not know it, Rachel had stolen Laban's household idols and she hid them. Laban searched, but he did not find the stolen idols. So he finally let Jacob go, after the two of them had made a covenant of peace.

Genesis 32:1-2, "Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is the camp of God!" Jacob is guarded by God's angels, but even so he is terrified when he hears that Esau is coming to meet him with 400 men. Jacob divides his people and flocks into two groups, thinking that if Esau attacks one, then at least the other group will escape.

And then Jacob prays. Jacob gives thanks to God for watching over him for the past twenty years and making him prosper. Then he says, in **Genesis 32:11, "Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children."**

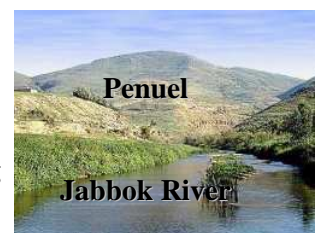
After praying, Jacob selected 550 animals from his herds and flocks and sent them ahead in groups as gifts to his brother Esau. God answers Jacob's prayers when Esau accepts the gifts and meets Jacob with joy instead of anger. But first, Jacob will endure a fateful night of trial. Let's read Genesis 32:22-32.

II. Scripture Genesis 32:22-32 (NIV)

[22] That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. [23] After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. [24] So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. [25] When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. [26] Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." [27] The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. [28] Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." [29] Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. [30] So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." [31] The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. [32] Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

III. Teaching

"Peniel," or, "Penuel," means, "*the Face of God.*" Occasionally you may see churches or ministries that use this name, so it is good to remember it. By giving this name to the place, Jacob showed that he knew that the man he wrestled with was actually the Lord. For Jewish scholars, this is a very difficult passage. After all, "*How can a man wrestle with God?*" Faced with such questions, some scholars try to say it is a dream or a parable. But the text seems to say that Jacob literally wrestled with God. How can this be? It is possible only if it is Jesus who has come to wrestle with Jacob. And I think that is how we need to understand the passage. Jesus comes and wrestles with Jacob, and the next morning Jacob is a changed man.



Twenty years of exile and trials end with a dramatic climax as Jacob literally wrestles with God. What is accomplished by this process? A new man is brought forth. This son of Isaac will no longer be called Jacob; now his name is Israel. He has a new name, and a new identity. The passage is full of prophetic meaning also. Crossing the Jabbok River into the Promised Land speaks of entering into the promises of God. But Jacob does not enter the Promised Land with his possessions, instead, Jacob sends his family and all his possessions ahead and he is left alone to undergo a trial. As Jesus taught, we also should send our possessions ahead of us, storing up treasure in heaven and not in this world (Luke 12:33).

Jacob is alone in the dark and he is afraid because Esau is coming. It is likely that Jacob continued to pray to God for protection as he had earlier. But then there is a sound in the night and a man appears.

Genesis 32:24-25, “So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.” The man must be Jesus, come in response to Jacob’s prayer. Jacob prayed for safety, but Jesus comes to wrestle with Jacob. Why? Because God often gives us what we need rather than what we ask for. And Jacob needed something that could only be received through struggle.

Jesus does not use His supernatural power, and it appears that in the strength of the body, Jacob and Jesus are pretty evenly matched. But then Jesus reaches out and wounds Jacob in the hip. Jacob is wounded, but even so Jacob clings to the man and will not let go. **Genesis 32:26, “Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me.”** By this time, Jacob knows that his opponent is not an ordinary man. And Jacob asks for a blessing.

Genesis 32:27-28, “The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.” Back in Genesis 27:19, Isaac, old and blind, asked Jacob a similar question. At that time Jacob lied, saying that he was Esau. Now, the Lord asks Jacob, **“What is your name?”** And Jacob answers honestly. In that honest answer there is repentance and confession of sin. Jacob can mean deceiver. Jacob admitted his sin, saying in effect, my name is, “deceiver.” When we mess up, God often comes to us and gives us a second chance. Jacob was given a second chance, and this time he told the truth. Now Jacob receives a new name, “Israel,” a name which speaks of one who struggles with God or who has power with God, and which can also mean a prince of God.

Genesis 32:29, “Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.” Jacob already knew who the man was; Jacob knew it was the Lord; that is why he asked for a blessing. And the Lord blesses Jacob. Jacob had already received a blessing in Genesis 28 that was like the blessing of Abraham and Isaac, but after this we will see something new. Jacob had become a deceiver because he wanted the birthright and the blessing, and knew that only one son would receive these things, so he schemed and lied to defraud Esau. Abraham had passed the blessing to Isaac, and Isaac was deceived into passing it on to Jacob. Up to this time, only one son had received the blessing, but in Genesis 49, Israel blesses all of his children and they all receive an inheritance of the Lord’s promises. There will still be a special line of blessing through which the Messiah will come, but now all of Israel’s children receive a share of the blessing.

The prophet Hosea tells us a little more about Jacob. **Hosea 12:3-5, “In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God. He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor. He found him at Bethel and talked with him there-- the Lord God Almighty, the Lord is his name of renown!”** Here the man who wrestled with Jacob is called an angel, but the context makes it clear that it was the Lord. Notice what it says about Jacob; Jacob wept and begged when he asked for the blessing. This gives us a different image than we might get from Genesis alone. We not only have to hold on to God, sometimes we also have to weep and beg to receive the blessing.

Jacob was alone in the dark, and all of his possessions had been sent on ahead. Jacob was afraid and he prayed. And the Lord came to Jacob. After struggling all night, the Lord had not broken Jacob’s resistance, but then the Lord wounded Jacob in the hip. Still, Jacob clung to the Lord and asked for a blessing, weeping and begging. The Lord gave him the blessing, but only after Jacob confessed his identity. Then the Lord named him Israel.

The idea that the Lord wounded Jacob may be difficult for some people. The Lord is the Great Healer; why would he wound Jacob? I think it must have been that Jacob’s pride had to be broken before he was ready to confess his sins and receive a new name. The Lord cares about our bodies and he often provides healing. But if it is necessary to wound our body in order to save our soul, then the Lord will do it. Our eternal salvation is much more important than our comfort in this world.

Our stories are often a lot like Jacob’s story. We often need to be separated from our possessions and wounded in some way before we are ready to confess our sins and repent. But when we overcome our pride and beg and weep before the lord, then we also receive a new start. In fact, in **Revelation 2:17**, after a command to repent, the Lord says, **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**

To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.” The Lord has a new name, a new identity for each of us. Is there something holding you back from receiving? Cling to the Lord and ask for His blessing. Hold on until you overcome every obstacle and receive the blessing and the new name, which speaks of a new identity in Christ and a new mission for your life.

IV. Conclusion

Do you want to receive a special blessing from the Lord? Sometimes you have to wait. And sometimes you have to struggle. Jacob waited 20 years and then struggled all night long, clinging to the Lord. His old name, “Jacob,” spoke of his sin of deception. But finally he received a new name, “Israel.” As I mentioned before, one meaning of this new name is, “prince of God.” Like Jacob, we are sinners; but when we confess our sin to the Lord and cling to Him no matter what, then He makes us princes and princess of His Kingdom.

In prayer, we come to the Lord with many requests, and that is okay. But because He loves us so much, the Lord often gives us what we need, not just want we think we want. Jacob prayed for safety, but he received a struggle. And when the sun came up the next morning Jacob was wounded, but He was also blessed. We need to wrestle with God also, because we all need a blessing that will change our lives. Pastor Jon Courson of Applegate Christian Fellowship in the USA puts it this way, *“I met God, I wrestled with God, and I will never walk the same.”* We walk differently after we have struggled with God.

On the internet, I found this painting by T. L. West. The words on the painting are anonymous, but some people say they were found in the pocket of a soldier who died at Gettysburg during the American Civil War. These words speak of how God often answers our prayers by giving us something different than we imagined and better than we asked for.



“I asked for strength that I might achieve;
He made me weak that I might obey.

I asked for health that I might do great things;
He gave me grace that I might do better things.

I asked for riches that I might be happy;
He gave me poverty that I might be wise.

I asked for power that I might have the praise of men;
He gave me weakness that I might feel the need of God.

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;
He gave me life that I might enjoy all things.

I received nothing I had asked for;
But He gave me all that I had hoped for.

Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered,
I am, among all men, most richly blessed.”

V. Let's Pray