

Jacob Comes Home

(Genesis 32-33)

Introduction

Have any of you ever had troubles in your life? [Teacher, discuss various trials the children may go through (parents arguing, getting in trouble for things they either did or did not do, pet dying, etc.)] Why do you think God allows us to go through troubles in our lives? God is all-powerful, why doesn't He just make everything always go well? If we can learn to lean on God, it's the trials in life that make us better people. The troubles in our lives make us a person of strong character: someone who is thoughtful and kind, someone who can handle it when disappointing things happen, or someone who can be forgiving and understanding when someone wrongs you.

We can learn a lot from the life of Jacob that will help us to be better people.

Opening Prayer

Father, open our spiritual ears this morning and help us to listen with our hearts. We don't want to miss any of the lessons You have for us this morning. We want to learn to become people like Jacob became through his life. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:32)

Lesson

We've been learning about the children of Israel. [Teacher, use some variation of the game, "Who am I?" to do a lesson review or review the progression of events using the following questions.]

Let's review:

1. Who was the first Jew? (Abraham)
2. What was the promise God made to him? (That his descendants would be a great nation)

3. Who was Abraham's first descendant? (Isaac)
4. Who were Isaac's descendants? (Esau and Jacob)
5. Which one of the twins did the blessing go to? (Jacob)
6. Did Jacob deserve to be blessed by God? (No!)
7. What's that a picture of? (How none of us deserves God's blessings, but we get them anyhow because God chooses to love us in spite of the fact that we fall short of perfection.)
8. Why was Jacob going to Haran? (His brother, Esau, wanted to kill him.)
9. What did Jacob dream when he camped along the way. (He dreamed of a ladder going up to Heaven. God promised that He would always be with Jacob and that He would bring Jacob back home. This was a great comfort to Jacob. He knew God loved him and forgave him of his sins.)
10. But what happened to cause Jacob to "reap what he sowed"? (Laban tricked him into working for 14 years without pay to get his beloved Rachel.)

Today we're going to pick up the story in Genesis 32. Jacob has just gotten away from Laban and he's on his way home to the land where he was born and where his father and brother still live.

Jacob knew that when he returned to the land of his father that he'd eventually meet up with his brother Esau. How would you feel knowing you were about to meet the person you had cheated out of his most precious possession? Jacob had taken Esau's birthright and his blessing. Now he was about to meet his brother for the first time in 20 years, and he was probably frantic with fear.

So, he comes up with a plan...

Genesis 32:3-5

Then Jacob sent messengers ahead to his brother, Esau, who was living in the region of Seir in the land of Edom. He told them, "Give this message to my master Esau: 'Humble greetings from your servant Jacob. Until now I have been living with Uncle Laban, and now I own cattle, donkeys, flocks of sheep and goats, and many servants, both men and women. I have sent these messengers to inform my lord of my coming, hoping that you will be friendly to me.'"

Jacob decided that he would send some messengers to his brother and tell him that he was coming home. In the message to Esau, Jacob told him how he had been living with Laban all these years and how God had prospered him.

Genesis 32:6

After delivering the message, the messengers returned to Jacob and reported, "We met your brother, Esau, and he is already on his way to meet you—with an army of 400 men!"

Jacob was greatly afraid! He thinks Esau is coming against him with a huge army of men. So he decided to pray, which is always a good thing to do at a time like this.

Genesis 32:9

Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my grandfather Abraham, and God of my father, Isaac—O LORD, You told me, 'Return to your own land and to your relatives.' And You promised me, 'I will treat you kindly.'

Jacob reminds God that He was the one who told him to go back home.

Genesis 32:11-12

O LORD, please rescue me from the hand of my brother, Esau. I am afraid that he is coming to attack me, along with my wives and children. But You promised me, 'I will surely treat you kindly, and I will multiply your descendants until they become as numerous as the sands along the seashore—too many to count.'"

Jacob reminds God of the promise that He had made to multiply his descendants. He's saying to God, "Don't let Esau wipe me and my family out now or Your promise won't come true!"

Then he sent gifts of sheep, goats, cows, and other animals to Esau. When Jacob left Canaan as a young man, he had been poor. But he was returning a very rich man. He decided to share the things he owned with his brother. So he made a gift to his brother out of his flocks in hopes that his brother would find favor with him.

That night when it was dark, and he was alone, some very unusual things happened. Jacob suddenly found himself wrestling with God Himself.

Genesis 32:24

This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a Man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break.

Jacob was wrestling with God Himself!

Genesis 32:26-28

Then the Man said, "Let Me go, for the dawn is breaking!" But Jacob said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me." "What is your name?" the Man asked. He replied, "Jacob." "Your name will no longer be Jacob," the Man told him. "From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won."

So God changed his name from Jacob which means "deceitful" to Israel which means "one who struggles with God and overcomes." God changed his name because an inner spiritual change had taken place in Jacob's heart. His character had changed.

Now Jacob asks the Man what His name is.

Genesis 32:29-30

"Please tell me your name," Jacob said. "Why do you want to know my name?" the Man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there. Jacob named the place Peniel (which means "face of God"), for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared."

Jacob had an encounter with God and he was forever changed from the inside out. (Teacher, tell about how that happened to you, too.)

Jacob had struggled through tough situations and continued to be loyal to God so God changed his name to Israel and he was now ready to meet Esau.

Genesis 33:1

Then Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming with his 400 men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and his two servant wives.

Jacob divided the family up in hopes that if there was an attack, not everyone would be wiped out all at once.

Genesis 33:4

Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. And they both wept.

And so Jacob and Esau were reunited and reconciled! Esau and Jacob lived in peace the rest of their lives. God wants us to have forgiving and loving hearts like Jacob and Esau.

Working through tough situations in life gives us stronger character. That's why the Bible tells us to count all of our trials as joy. God allows us to go through hard times because He knows it will make us more loving and forgiving, kind and understanding towards other people.

The difference is how we handle the trials -- will we be like a cork on a rough sea or will we be like a rock? Will we float or sink? If we cling to God and remain loyal to His ways, we will float to the top. (Teacher, as an object lesson, bring in a pale of water, a rock and a cork and let the children see this lesson concept!)

We have learned a lot about life through studying Jacob's life. His story is an example of a person that changed from being selfish and greedy to one who has become a true servant of God. Jacob became Israel.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, help us to learn from the life of Jacob. Help us to keep our relationships with our family members healthy and full of love. Keep us honest, Lord. We want to always be loving and forgiving. And, Lord, when things do go wrong in our relationships, help us to be the first ones to be peacemakers. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

CRAFT CORNER

GAME CENTER

Use the following review questions in a game of your choice:

Review Questions:

Here are some questions to help us remember some of the lessons we've learned from Jacob's life.

1. What did God promise Rebekah concerning her twin sons just before they were born? (That they would become enemy nations and the younger one would rule over the older)
2. What did Jacob trick Esau into selling to him? (Birthright)
3. To fulfill God's promise to Rebekah, was it necessary for Jacob to trick Esau into selling him the birthright? (No! God doesn't need us to take matters into our own hands. He doesn't want us to be deceitful or crafty to help Him out.)
4. What can we learn from Jacob's sin? (Don't trick people into doing something they shouldn't do. Let God fulfill His great plan for our life in His time and in His way.)
5. When Jacob tricked his father into giving him the birthright blessing, was he more concerned that his dad would find out that he deceived him, or that he was going against God's desire to be honest? (He was more worried about getting caught than about doing what was right.)
6. What happened when Esau found out that Jacob got the special birthright blessing? (He wanted to kill his brother.)
7. What lesson can we learn from Esau's sins? (We shouldn't treat our birthright as Christians lightly. We need to appreciate our relationship with the Lord and do everything we can to please God.)

8. What lesson can we learn from Rebekah's sins? (We must wait upon the Lord and not take things into our own hands to try to force God's will to happen.)
9. When Jacob ran away from home he felt horrible. He'd broken up his whole family. His father probably was disappointed with him for tricking him. His brother wanted to kill him. What happened to finally make Jacob feel good about life again? (He had a dream in which God promised to be with him and to bring him back home. Jacob knew that God forgave him and loved him and that's what made him feel like a new person inside.)
10. What have we learned from Jacob that we should do when we sin against someone? (It's not enough to ask forgiveness from that person. We won't feel completely restored until we hear from God and know that He loves and forgives us.)
11. What happened to Jacob to teach him how it feels when someone tricks you? (On his wedding night, Laban brought Leah to Jacob instead of Rachel.)
12. What was Jacob's reaction to being tricked by Laban? Did he become angry and plot revenge? (No! Jacob kept his side of the bargain. He worked another 7 years for Rachel's hand in marriage. He learned that sin has a way of coming back to haunt us.)
13. Why did Jacob's brothers-in-law become jealous of Jacob? (God blessed Jacob and his flocks increased in number. They felt that those sheep and goats should have been theirs.)
14. How did God use the uncomfortable situation of Laban's son's anger against Jacob? (That's what made Jacob decide it was time to move away from Laban and go back to the land of his own father.)
15. What lesson did you learn when Jacob and Laban made peace before they parted? (God wants us to be quick to forgive so that anger does not fester.)
16. Why did God change Jacob's name to Israel? (Jacob means "deceitful" and Israel means, "one who struggles with God and overcomes." This name change portrayed an inner spiritual change that had taken place in Jacob's heart. Working through tough situations in life gives us stronger character.)
17. When are times you might need to forgive someone?
18. How can you show forgiveness? How has a friend shown that he forgave you?
19. When is it hard to forgive someone?
20. What can you say or do to show forgiveness?
21. How does knowing God forgives us help us forgive others?
22. What can you do when you don't feel like forgiving someone?

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