

Life Lesson 16
Jacob Returns Home
Text: Genesis 31-33

Introduction

Jacob lived with his Uncle Laban for twenty years, and God blessed him during that time. He had a big family -- eleven sons and some daughters. He also had many cattle and sheep. Things were going well, but big trouble was on the way.

The Story

God had blessed Jacob so much that Laban and his sons were jealous. If Laban told Jacob he could have the spotted sheep from the herd for his pay, all the sheep would have spotted lambs. If he told Jacob he could have the striped ones, the strongest were striped. Laban changed Jacob's wages ten times, but God still made things come out the best for Jacob.

"Jacob has the best of everything and *we* should have it. It really belongs to us," Laban's sons said.

Jacob decided it was time to leave, and his wives agreed with him. They packed up secretly and left at night so Laban wouldn't know about it. When Laban found out that Jacob had left with his daughters and the cattle, he was angry! He came out after them ready to fight Jacob and bring them all back.

God had different plans, though. He spoke to Laban in a dream and told him to leave Jacob alone.

More troubles were ahead for Jacob and his family. His brother, Esau, was still living in the land of Canaan. Had he forgiven Jacob yet? Did he still want to kill him?

Jacob didn't know, but he traveled home anyway.

As he drew near his old home, he thought he'd better find out if Esau was still alive, and if he was still mad. He sent messengers ahead of him to tell Esau he was coming with his family. Maybe Esau had forgiven him.

The messengers came back with bad news.

"We told your brother you were coming. Now he's coming to meet you with 400 men," they told Jacob.

So his brother was still mad. How could he and his family and servants fight with 400 men? Jacob was afraid. He divided up his family and his flocks and herds, so that perhaps some of them could get away if Esau attacked.

Then he prayed a very different prayer from his first one. Now he didn't bargain with God. He said, "I don't deserve the least of your mercies. I left with nothing and have come back with two big groups of family and belongings. But, You said You would take care of me, so I'm trusting You to deliver me and my children from the hands of my brother Esau."

Jacob sent a present of many animals to Esau and told the servant to say, "These are a present for you from your brother, and he'll be here in a little while."

He sent two other groups of sheep, camels, and cows as presents to Esau with the same message, so that as Esau came closer he would keep on meeting gifts sent to him from Jacob.

Jacob had done all he could do. He had told his brother he was sorry, and sent presents to make up for the things he had stolen. He had protected his family the best he knew how. Now he had to wait for his brother to arrive. He must have been nervous

still, because he was up late that night, alone.

Then a man came and began to wrestle with Jacob. Jacob knew he wasn't an ordinary man, but an angel.

"Let me go," the angel said.

"I won't let you go until you bless me," Jacob answered.

"What is your name?" the angel asked him.

"Jacob," he replied. "Jacob" meant "supplanter" or "tricky."

"You won't be called Jacob anymore," the angel said. "Now your name is Israel, a prince of God."

"What is your name?" he asked the angel.

"Why do you ask? You don't need to know," the angel replied. Then the angel blessed him, and went away.

Jacob, or Israel as he was then called, crossed over the brook to join his family. As he walked, he limped because the angel had hurt his thigh.

It was dawn as he came into his camp. He looked up and could see Esau and the 400 men coming! He quickly divided the family into four groups, and went to meet his brother.

Would Esau kill him? Would he attack the children? He ran toward Jacob -- but not to kill him. Instead he grabbed Jacob to hug him! He had forgiven Jacob.

It was wonderful to be reconciled again to his brother, but Jacob still had more sorrow ahead on his long trip. His beloved wife, Rachel, had a little boy, and then she died. Jacob buried her then took the baby, Benjamin, with the rest of his children the rest of the way back to his father's house.

How surprised Isaac must have been to see his son! Jacob must have been surprised, too, to find his father still alive because he had thought him on the point of death when he left twenty years ago. It was his mother, Rebekah, who was no longer living. Because of her tricky schemes, she had never again seen her favorite son.

Isaac was 180 years old when he died, and Jacob and Esau buried him.

The Life Lesson

What a lot of exciting adventures Jacob had on his trip back home! He had been in danger, but God had taken care of him, and blessed him. When you are living for God and obeying Him, you don't need to be afraid. He is bigger than all the things that might frighten you and can even turn your enemies into your friends.

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Review Questions

Why were Rachel and Leah's brothers angry with Jacob?

Because God blessed Jacob and he always had the best flocks.

Why did Jacob decide to go home?

Because Laban kept cheating him.

What did Jacob fear about the journey home?

He was afraid that Esau would still be angry and would want to kill him.

What news did the messengers bring back to Jacob?

Esau was coming with 400 men.

What did Jacob do to show his brother he was sorry for stealing from him?

He sent presents of sheep and cattle to meet Esau.

Who did Jacob wrestle with?

An angel

What did Jacob tell the angel?

"I won't let you go until you bless me."

What was Jacob's new name?

Israel

What did Esau do when the brothers met?

He hugged Jacob.