

For GC Discussion

- Spend some time thinking about the progression of Jacob's relationship with God, and the significance of what was happening when God came to wrestle with him.

- How does Jacob's experience encourage us, or teach us how God might relate to us too?

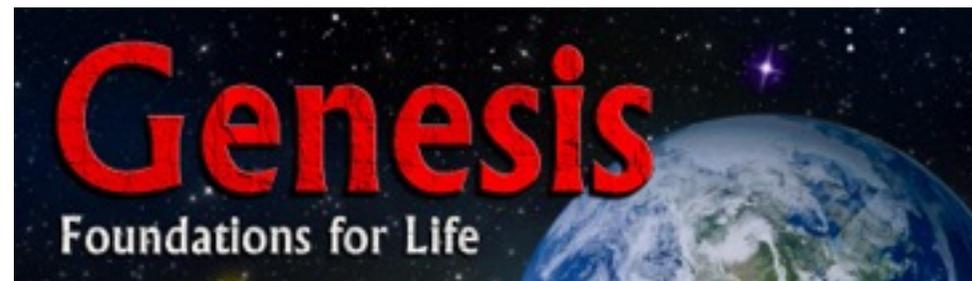
For the Kids

Why do you think Jacob wouldn't let go of God when he was wrestling Him?

Next Week: we conclude our study of Jacob's life before moving on to look at his son Joseph.

Notes and Questions

For Worship: Listen to *'Blessings'* by Laura Story. You can find it on YouTube, or on the Hill City Church blog on the website.



Week 16: Jacob: Wrestling with God

Chapters 32-33

This Weeks Summary

This week we looked at Jacob's return to his homeland as a changed man. His wrestling match with a divine stranger confirms the blessing of God that rests on his life.

For Study:

These last few weeks we have been charting the journey that Jacob has been on towards the blessing of God. It reminds me of the journey of another man of faith - Simon Peter, Jesus disciple. The following references chart Peter's journey with Jesus and some of the big lessons he had to learn along the way:

Calling	- Luke 5:1-11
Faith	- Matthew 14:22-33
Confession/Confusion	- John 6:66-69; Matthew 16:13-23
Transfiguration	- Matthew 17:1-13
Failure	- Matthew 26:36-46
Denial	- Mark 14:26-31, 66-72
Restoration	- John 21:15-19
Boldness	- Acts 2:1ff, 4:1-22
Flexibility	- Acts 11:1-18

This week we moved on in our study of the life of Jacob as he returns home a changed man - transformed both by the grace of God at Bethel, and years of frustrating service at the hand of his uncle Laban. Here is a summary of just what God is doing in Jacob's life in this whole process.

God humbled Jacob:

I'm pretty sure this is the main point of the 20 years service God puts Jacob through with his uncle. Jacob sees at first hand what it's like to be deceived and manipulated just as he has done to his own family. He also discovers very clearly that prosperity comes not through the scheming of man but through the grace of God, as Jacob finds himself prospering despite Laban's best efforts. Jacob knows that his own underhand tactics to obtain the blessing completely failed, and just left him a fugitive on the run from his brother, and yet here, in this strange land, Jacob sees the God who met with him at Bethel grant him children (albeit in some slightly iffy circumstances!), flocks and possessions despite Jacob's own wickedness. It's pure grace, and when we see that kind of grace we can't help but be humbled.

God puts Jacob in a place where he knows he needs Him:

Jacob's prayer of chapter 32:9-12 is one of the first and clearest signs for us that Jacob has been significantly changed by his time of humbling service. You can't really imagine Jacob praying anything like this 20 years ago when he wasn't really interested in having God's help in obtaining what he wanted. Back then, he was more interested in manipulating the situations himself to make it happen, but now he has been brought to a place where he knows he can't cope with what lies ahead himself but desperately needs the help of the God of Bethel. Jacob's messengers are sent ahead to meet Esau, and as soon as he hears that Esau has brought 400 men with him Jacob fears the worst. How could he and his household possibly survive an Esau who is determined to avenge the wrongs of the past? Jacob must have felt quite stuck at this point - does he go forward to certain defeat, or back to Laban to be taken advantage of some more? However, rather than just trying to manipulate the situation Jacob does exactly what we should all do when we feel stuck and helpless - he prays. We'll see shortly that Jacob needn't have worried about Esau, but he doesn't know that now, and his prayer demonstrates clearly for us that Jacob is now clear - he needs the grace and the protection of God far more than he needs to come up with a clever plan, and that is an incredibly healthy place to be in.

God stirs faith in Jacob's heart:

If it hasn't before, this prayer is where the promise of Bethel really kicks in for Jacob. He looks back at the past 20 years and sees very clearly that it is God who has blessed him though he is completely undeserving (verse 10). He also looks ahead and sees just as clearly that if God is going to fulfil His promise to him that He is going to have to bring him safely through this difficult situation. It's a classic way that God works in our lives - the more we see Him fulfil His promises and extend grace to us, the more we become convinced that He will never let us down, and the greater our faith becomes. Maybe Jacob is wavering a bit at this point, in the face of his brother Esau, but the very fact that he cries out to God to save him is testament to the faith that God has been stirring in his heart since the promise at Bethel.

God brought Jacob back to the moment of his greatest failure:

The episode where Jacob wrestles with a Divine stranger is in many ways surrounded by mystery. We're not given any clear explanation of what's happening in the text, though it is clearly something significant. What many people have recognised as central to the narrative is the question the stranger asks Jacob in verse 27. It seems a simple enough question - 'what is your name?' and yet when you realise it is exactly the same question as Jacob was asked 20 years before when he was on the brink of stealing his brother's blessing it takes on a whole new meaning. The answer that time was a deception that may have won his father's blessing, but was far removed from the way that God wanted him to behave. Now, having humbled Jacob and shown him a glimpse of His faithfulness, God has brought him full circle, and puts that same question before Jacob again. It's as if God is asking Jacob - 'do you still feel you need to hide, deceive and pretend so that you can get my blessing, or are you willing to come to me as you are, realising my grace is enough even for a failure like you.' This points us to a God who, though He sees and knows all our failings and blesses us despite them, He is committed to so changing us that when we're brought back to the moments of our greatest failures we would no longer fall, but by His grace succeed.

God went ahead of Jacob:

Lastly, we see that, as we've mentioned, Jacob didn't need to worry about Esau his brother. God had gone before Jacob, preparing the way for him, once again proving His faithfulness to His chosen man - faithfulness that we too can depend on wherever God may take us.