



March 31 – April 1, 2012

Genesis 30 – 32

“Wrestling with God”

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While Jacob had been living in Haran for the last 20 years, he had been working for his father-in-law, Laban. During this time he also got married, and had 11 sons by four women, and he had accumulated large flocks and herds, on the way to becoming quite wealthy. But after 20 years the Lord spoke to Jacob and told him it was time to go home to Israel, the land God had promised on oath to Jacob’s grandfather, Abraham, and his father, Isaac.¹

If you use your imagination, you can picture the scene of Jacob’s departure. There would have been a large number of camels, which would have been the equivalent of a bunch of modern minivans! Jacob loaded up both of his wives, 11 kids, two nannies, all of their belongings, including goats and lambs, and everything else he owned, to make the 500-mile journey back to Israel.

An interesting incident occurred as Jacob and his retinue got underway. Rachel, Jacob’s wife, had never been away from home before, and when a person leaves home for the first time, they oftentimes take something with them that has sentimental value as a way to remember home and, for Rachel, that thing was her father’s idols. Having grown up in a pagan home, all Rachel’s been familiar with up to this time were her father’s gods. She didn’t know much about Jacob’s God, because Jacob hadn’t been much of a spiritual leader. However, he is maturing, and because God is at work in his life, he’s slowly but surely getting to be a godly man.

¹ [Genesis 31:3, 17–18.](#)

Rachel And Laban's Idols

1. **Genesis 31:19** - Rachel steals Laban's idols.
 - a. If your god can be stolen, it probably isn't much of a god!
2. **Genesis 31:20-21** - Jacob gathered his family and all of his livestock and possessions and fled without even saying goodbye to Laban.
 - a. They had been gone three days before Laban even realized they were gone!
3. **Genesis 31:22-30** - Laban asks, "Where are my gods?"
 - a. If you have to ask, "Where is my god?" it's probably not much of a god!
4. **Genesis 31:31-34** - Rachel hides her father's gods.
 - a. If you can sit on your god, it's probably not much of a god!
5. **Genesis 31:35-34** - Laban can't find his gods.
 - a. If you can't find your god, it's probably not much of a god!

Jacob's Spiritual Maturity: Jacob Gives Glory To God

6. In **Genesis 31:42**, we read a telling statement about Jacob's growing relationship with the Lord: *"If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you."*
7. Jacob had come to know that it was God who had taken care of him and provided for him.
8. Jacob recognized God's faithfulness to him.

Jacob's Spiritual Maturity: Jacob Worships God

9. **Genesis 31:54a** - *"[Jacob] offered a sacrifice there in the hill country..."*
10. This is the first time we read of Jacob offering a sacrifice in worship of God.

Jacob's Spiritual Maturity: Jacob Reconciles With Esau

11. **Genesis 32:3-5** - *“Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. He instructed them: ‘This is what you are to say to my master Esau: ‘Your servant Jacob says, I have been staying with Laban and have remained there till now. I have cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, menservants and maidservants. Now I am sending this message to my lord, that I may find favor in your eyes.’ ”*

Jacob's Spiritual Maturity: Jacob Speaks With God

12. **Genesis 32:9-10a** - *“Then Jacob prayed, ‘O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, ‘Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,’ I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant.’ ”*
13. This is the first time the Bible records Jacob praying.

Jacob's Spiritual Maturity: God Is Still At Work

14. God had used the last 20 years of Jacob's life to wear him down and chisel away at some of the sin issues in his life.
 - a. God used Laban as a mirror to reflect some of Laban's “sin issues” that were evident in Jacob's life.
 - b. God used the responsibilities that go along with marriage, raising a family, and working hard to make a living, to mature him.
 - c. As a result, we can see the changes in Jacob's life.
 - i. He's more surrendered to the Lord.
 - ii. He's more spiritually mature.
 1. Giving glory to God.
 2. Worshipping God.
 3. Praying to God.
 4. Reconciling with loved-ones.
 - iii. He's getting right, both vertically (with the Lord) and horizontally (with man).
15. But, there's still one major area in Jacob's life that he wrestles with, and that's the problem of deception.
 - a. He deceived Laban when he took his family from Haran.
 - i. **Genesis 31:20** - *“Jacob deceived Laban by not telling him he was running away.”*

ii. Laban asked Jacob, *“Why did you run off secretly and deceive me?”*
(Genesis 31:27)

16. God wants Jacob to go home to Israel a changed man, and dealing with this major issue that has ruled his life is a priority to God.
17. While it's true Jacob had made real progress in his life, it's also true that he had some lordship issues that needed to be wrestled out of his life... literally!

Jacob's Wrestled With God

18. The *“man”* mentioned in Genesis 32:22-24 is Jesus.²
 - a. Jacob called that place Peniel, which means *“face of God.”*
 - b. Hosea 12:3-5 - *“In the womb Jacob 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 is his name of renown!”*
19. God initiated this all-night wrestling match.
20. Jacob didn't start out wanting anything from God, it was that God wanted something from Jacob; he wanted to deal with Jacob's proud self-reliance and deceptive ways.
21. How is it possible that God could not overpower Jacob?
 - a. The first of two reasonable explanations as to why he *“could not overpower him”* would be in the sense of his physical strength.
 - i. When God took on flesh, he subjected himself to human limitations.
 1. When he was hot, he perspired and got thirsty.
 2. When he worked hard, he got hungry.
 3. When he wrestled, he got tired.
 - ii. The Lord was not limited regarding his supernatural power, and it was that supernatural power - which is unlimited - that he tapped into to overcome Jacob.
 - b. The second explanation is that he *“could not”* because he would not.
 - i. Of course the Lord had the ability to overcome Jacob, but he chose not to, because it would have been over too soon.
 - ii. Many times God needs us to experience the struggle so we can appreciate the victory.

² An Old Testament, pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus is called a Theophany or Christophany.

Jacob's Changed Life

22. Lordship

- a. There is a struggle that happens when we wrestle with God's lordship in certain areas of our lives.
- b. Jacob is a picture of the struggle concerning our willingness to allow the Lord to be over every area of our lives, including our thoughts, attitudes, behavior, money, marriage, business, etc.
- c. We all need to ask the question, "Is Jesus really Lord?"

23. Love

- a. It's as if the Lord was saying, "Jacob, I'm going to throw you to the mat so I can wrestle you until you tap out, because I love you too much to let you stay this way."

24. Determination

- a. Jacob held on to God and refused to let him go until he received a blessing.
- b. This is a picture of sheer desperation and determination, because we see a man who is utterly and totally empty of self, clinging to God.

25. New Identity

- a. All of Jacob's life he had been living with the label of deceiver.
- b. God entered Jacob's life and basically said, "No longer will you be known as the Deceiver, you're going to be known as 'governed by God.'" ³
- c. God gave him a limp so he would always remember the day he wrestled with the Lord and the fact that God prevailed.
- d. [2 Corinthians 5:17](#) - *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"*

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Genesis 31-32](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Share examples of "gods" in your life.
4. Have you had a "god" (relationship or thing) that could be stolen?
 - a. How has your thinking changed in regard to the "relationship or thing"?

³ Israel means, "governed by God."

5. Would you agree with Pastor Gary, that whatever it was, it was probably not much of a god?
6. How has the Lord worked in your life to bring you into a more spiritually mature life?
7. How are you growing and maturing when it comes to giving glory to God, worship, reconciliation with others, and prayer?
8. Are there examples of times in your life when you wrestled with the Lord over something?
9. Spend time talking about the things the Lord has done in your life to bring you to the place of greater surrender to his lordship.
10. What does the Lord desire to change in your life and what has he been wrestling with you about?
11. Read and discuss [2 Corinthians 5:17](#).
 - a. What is your understanding of your new identity in Christ?
12. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: seek the Lord in such a way that they would be reminded of the way they used to be, so that they would cling to the Lord, receive his blessing and his help in living to bring him glory; recognize his lordship in every area of life; personally recognize the depth of his love for them; give thanks for their new identity in Christ!

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).