

Jacob's Struggles

GENESIS 31–32

FIRST DAY: Introduction

Isn't it wonderful to consider that God never gives up on us! However, He will often use unrest, discomfort, and hard or unfair circumstances to propel us into His plans and build our faith. This is exactly what we see in Jacob's life.

Though Jacob's life was fraught with attempts to manipulate his circumstances to his own advantage, God was nevertheless with him. God protected, prospered, and progressively revealed Himself to Jacob. As Jacob labored twenty years in Laban's house, he began to realize God's presence with him and God's blessing upon him, even in the hardships he endured. God was bringing Jacob slowly to the end of his own nature that He might mold him into a man of faith.

God does not give up on His children! However, He often allows difficulties in our lives to work out our selfish nature and propel us to seek Him. God progressively reveals His presence with us, even in hard times, so that our faith might mature and grow.

Take a moment to thank God for His constant presence in your life.

SECOND DAY: Read Genesis 31:1–24

1. Even under the oppressive and oppositional conditions of Laban's employment, God's continued blessing on Jacob's life became obvious. As a result, according to Genesis 31:1–2, what did Jacob:
 - a. Hear (verse 1)
 - b. See (verse 2)

2. How do you see the circumstances in Jacob's life propelling him toward God's command? Genesis 31:3
 - a. Why do you think God's promise to *be with* Jacob was crucial under the circumstances?

3. After receiving the Lord's command, Jacob *called Rachel and Leah to the field* to talk to them (Genesis 31:4). Use his words in Genesis 31:5–9 to contrast and comment on:
 - a. Laban's maltreatment (verses 5a, 6–7a)

 - b. God's favor (verses 5b, 7b–9)

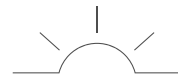
4. Jacob told Rachel and Leah of a *dream* he had in which God indicated that He had directed the *flocks* to mate, and conceive to Jacob's advantage (Genesis 31:10–12a). Why did God do this? Genesis 31:12b
 - a. Link this with Hebrews 4:13. How does this minister to you?

5. Record God's declaration to Jacob from Genesis 31:13.
 - a. Recall Genesis 28:15–22 and share your observations.

6. In response to Jacob's announcement about leaving, Rachel and Leah said, *That's fine with us! We won't inherit any of our father's wealth anyway. He has reduced our rights to those of foreign women. And after he sold us, he wasted the money you paid him for us. All the wealth God has given you from our father legally belongs to us and our children. So go ahead and do whatever God has told you* (Genesis 31:14–16 NLT). What does this speech reveal about:
 - a. Rachel and Leah

 - b. Laban

7. From Genesis 31:17–21, briefly summarize Jacob's subsequent departure.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Perhaps *Rachel had stolen the household idols* as a good luck charm. These were the idols she had been raised to honor. According to some commentators, possession of these household idols indicated leadership in the family and were often used as divining tools, or a guarantee of inheritance, or property rights.

8. On the *third day* Laban discovered *that Jacob had fled*, so he *pursued* him (Genesis 31:22–23). Remark on what happened before Laban *overtook* Jacob. Genesis 31:24

9. From your study today, what evidence do you see of God’s hand upon Jacob’s life?
 - a. Share a way this encourages you.

THIRD DAY: Read Genesis 31:25–55

1. After Jacob *stole away* and fled with all he had, *Laban overtook Jacob* in *the mountains* (Genesis 31:25). From Genesis 31:26–29, read Laban’s rebuke of Jacob and comment on his claim.
 - a. Had God not intervened, what do you think Laban intended to do to Jacob?

2. Laban accused Jacob of stealing his *gods* (Genesis 31:30). From Genesis 31:31–32, remark on Jacob’s response.

3. Use Genesis 31:33–35 to describe Laban’s search for his idols.
 - a. What do you think of gods that can be stolen and hidden in such a fashion? See Isaiah 44:9–11.

4. Naturally, *Jacob was angry* with Laban because of this and *rebuked* him. Use Jacob’s rebuke in Genesis 31:36–42 to note and comment on:
 - a. Jacob’s challenge to Laban (verses 36–37)

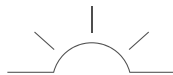
 - b. Jacob’s conduct toward Laban (verses 38–41)

 - c. Laban’s treatment of Jacob (verses 39b, 41b)



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Jacob used the phrase, *the Fear of Isaac* in verses 42 and 53. This phrase can be translated, *the God that Isaac feared*, and implied that others should fear Him as well.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Mizpah was a word of suspicion and fear, not love and trust.

d. Jacob's testimony (verse 42)

(1) What does this account reveal to you about Jacob's progressive understanding of God?

5. Incredibly, Laban still claimed ownership over *all* Jacob had, but acquiesced and made a *covenant* (Genesis 31:43–44). Use Genesis 31:45–55 to remark on the following about this *covenant*:

a. The monument (verses 45–48)

b. The invocation (verses 49–50)

c. The agreement (verses 51–53)

(1) Notice that Laban swore by the *God of Abraham*, the pagan god of *Nahor*, and the god of *their father*; whereas, Jacob solely swore by the *Fear of Isaac*. What do you find interesting about this?

- d. The sacrifice and parting (verses 54–55)
6. What stands out to you most about the confrontation between Laban and Jacob?

FOURTH DAY: Read Genesis 32:1–21

1. After Jacob went his way, *the angels of God met him* (Genesis 32:1). Why do you think it is noteworthy that this happened after Jacob parted from Laban?
 - a. What did Jacob do when he *saw them*? Genesis 32:2
 - (1) *Mahanaim* means *double camp*, signifying that the *camp* of God's angels was accompanying Jacob's *camp*. How do you think this revelation might have affected him?
 - (2) This was the second time Jacob had seen the angels of God. Recall his first experience from Genesis 28:12. What do you think God was revealing to Jacob?

2. Jacob then *sent messengers to Esau* to announce his coming (Genesis 32:3). From Genesis 32:4–5 remark on the way Jacob addressed Esau in this message.
 - a. What does this convey to you about Jacob?

3. The *messengers* reported back to Jacob that Esau was *coming to meet* him with *four hundred men* (Genesis 32:6). From Jacob's response in Genesis 32:7–8, record:
 - a. How Jacob felt (verse 7a)

 - b. What Jacob did (verse 7b)

 - c. What Jacob reasoned (verse 8)

4. After his initial reaction, Jacob responded to the messengers' report by praying. Use his prayer in Genesis 32:9–12 to note and remark on:
 - a. How Jacob addressed God (verse 9a)

 - b. What God had *said* to Jacob (verses 9b, 12)

- (1) Why do you think it helped Jacob to recall these promises?
 - (2) Recall a promise of God that ministered to you during a difficult circumstance.
- c. What Jacob recognized or acknowledged (verse 10)
- (1) How does this demonstrate a change in Jacob's attitude?
- d. Jacob's plea (verse 11)
5. That night Jacob *lodged there* and prepared an exorbitant gift of over 550 livestock for Esau (Genesis 32:13–15). Use Genesis 32:16–20a to briefly summarize his instructions to *his servants* concerning this gift.
- a. Observe Jacob's rationale for this in Genesis 32:20b. Considering that Jacob had just prayed and committed this situation to the Lord, what does this indicate?

6. After Jacob sent the *present* ahead, *he himself lodged that night in the camp* (Genesis 32:21). Why do you think Jacob did this?

a. What does Proverbs 21:14 say about this?

7. From your lesson today, observe a way you see God pressing Jacob into greater faith.

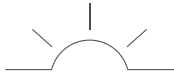
a. Share a way God has used hard circumstances to press you to greater faith.

FIFTH DAY: Read Genesis 32:22–32

1. After sending the *present* to Esau, Jacob took his family and servants *over the ford of Jabbok* ahead of him (Genesis 32:22–23). What happened when Jacob was *left alone*? Genesis 32:24

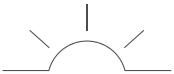
a. What did the *Man* do *when He saw that He did not prevail* against Jacob? Genesis 32:25

2. In Jacob's weakened state, what did he refuse to do? Genesis 32:26
 - a. Link this with Hosea 12:3–5 and record your insights about this struggle.
 - b. Why do you think God *shrank* Jacob's hip muscle? See also 2 Corinthians 12:9–10.
3. The Man's response was to ask Jacob for his *name* (Genesis 32:27). A *name* in those days denoted the nature of a person. Why do you think it is significant that Jacob was given a new *name*? Genesis 32:28
 - a. Bible scholars note that *Israel* means *God rules* or *God prevails*. Why was this a fitting new name for Jacob?
4. As a show of superiority, the *Man* would not reveal His *name* when Jacob asked; yet He still *blessed* Jacob (Genesis 32:29). Why is this noteworthy? See Hebrews 7:7.
5. Jacob called that place *Peniel*. What did Jacob recognize about the Man with whom he wrestled? Genesis 32:30



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Note that *Peniel* (*Face of God*) is the location where Jacob met with God, but *Penue!* is a declaration about Jacob's new relationship with God.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Warren Wiersbe said Jacob left this encounter with a new name, a new walk, and a new relationship with God.³¹

a. According to John 1:18, why is this remarkable?

6. As the sun rose and Jacob *crossed over* to rejoin his family, *he limped on his hip* (Genesis 32:31). To commemorate this remarkable encounter, what do the Israelites do *to this day*? Genesis 32:32

7. Bible scholars have described the moment when Jacob wrestled with God, and God prevailed over Jacob, as the high point of his life. Why do you think this is so?

a. From Jacob's testimony, what hope do you receive about your own losses or weaknesses?

SIXTH DAY: Review

1. From your study this week, share your greatest takeaway concerning Jacob's struggles with:

a. Laban

b. Esau

c. God

2. Review the following Scriptures to note Our Great Creator's progressive revelation to Jacob:
 - a. Genesis 31:3
 - b. Genesis 31:5
 - c. Genesis 31:7
 - d. Genesis 31:9
 - e. Genesis 31:11–12a
 - f. Genesis 31:29
 - g. Genesis 31:42
 - h. Genesis 32:1–2a
 - i. Genesis 32:9–10, 12
 - j. Genesis 32:28–29
3. Share a way Our Great Creator has progressively revealed His presence to you.