Jacob Goes Back to the Land and Wrestles

Genesis 31:1 - 33:20; 35:1-15

Bible Memory Verse

Genesis 32:7 NIV

Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and men and have overcome.

Bible Story

I wonder if deception is a theme in the life of Jacob? It seems to crop up a lot in the stories about him in the Bible. He deceived his brother Esau, his father Isaac, and now in the following story he continues this cunning practice.

Perhaps in return for the deception that Laban did by switching daughters on him, Jacob mounts an elaborate ruse. He begins to breed the livestock so that he will get the good ones and that Laban will get the bad, lame ones. It works well. Laban's sons notice Jacob's increasing wealth and wonder if they should fear this man. Jacob notices that "Laban's attitude toward him was not what it had been" (Genesis 31:2). And to top off the warning bells, the Lord speaks: "Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you" (Genesis 31:3).

Jacob obeys. He gathers up his wives, servants, children, and his livestock and secretly tries to leave. Laban catches wind of this and pursues Jacob, almost as an act of war. They meet and discuss the situation. They end up establishing a covenant, a promise between the two of them not to harm each other.

And so Jacob continues on his way. He prepares to reunite with his brother Esau, who by the way, wanted to kill him twenty years earlier. Had Esau's opinion of Jacob changed in

twenty years? Jacob would soon find out. He sent his family and all of his stuff ahead to meet Esau and he was left alone… at night… and something happens:

> *"…a man wrestled with [Jacob] until daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.'*
>
> *"But Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.'*
>
> *"The man asked him, 'What is your name?'*
>
> *"'Jacob,' he answered.*
>
> *"Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome" (Genesis 32:24-28).*

Later, Jacob was warmly received by Esau, and eventually Jacob settles at a place called Bethel. Remember? The "house of God" and the "gate of heaven."

Thus, Jacob and his family returned to the land that God had promised and they settled there.

Life Application

God charts the course of our lives using our choices no matter if those choices are good or bad. Somehow God knows what we are going to choose and He works His divine will accordingly. God needed Jacob to go through the things he did in order to make him the man that he needed to be, and, maybe, in order to be the person God needed to accomplish the work in the world He was doing.

Confusing, huh? Yeah. Charting the hand of God in human events is often frustrating and yields only mediocre results. Although we can trust the heart of God that his will is being done in our lives on earth as it is in heaven. I think we can see God's hand at work in our lives when we look back, and not necessarily in the present...

Perhaps that is what God really wants—people that blindly trust His heart and course for our lives.

Review Questions

1. Who was Jacob's next target of deception/stealing? His uncle, Laban.
2. How did Jacob steal from his uncle Laban? By breeding the good livestock for himself, and the bad, lame ones for Laban. Jacob hid this practice through deception.
3. Who instructs Jacob to go back to his homeland? The Lord God.
4. Was Laban really excited when Jacob left all of a sudden without telling him? No.
5. Why was Jacob so nervous and afraid to go back to his homeland? Because his brother, Esau, still lived there and Jacob was still afraid of him
6. Who did Jacob wrestle with? The Lord God (perhaps the pre-incarnate Jesus)
7. What was Jacob's name changed to? Israel
8. What does Israel mean? One who wrestles with God

Coloring Sheet

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