

STRUGGLING WITH JACOB

A SERMON & BIBLE STUDY SERIES ON THE LIFE OF *Jacob*

28 APRIL - 14 JULY 2024

GENESIS 25:19 - 35:29

Bible Studies - Part 2

Studies 7-10



KIAMA ANGLICAN CHURCHES

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Genesis 25:19 - 35:29

Struggling With Jacob

Bible Studies accompanying the
Sermon Series on the Life of Jacob

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Gordon Wenham's Word Biblical Commentary on
Genesis 16-50 was a major source for these studies

Study 7 - Genesis 29:31 - 30:24

Jacob's Children

Getting Started

1. What's your favourite TV Soap Opera?

This episode lies at the centre of the Jacob story. The scene has been set in the preceding verses with Jacob's involuntary bigamous marriage to Leah and Rachel (29:22-28), and the mention of the two maidservants (29:22, 29). The unhappy tensions, highlighted by the comment that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah (29:30), are fully on display in what follows and the tangled web of relationships rival any TV Soap Opera.

Read Genesis 29:31 - 30:24

2. Give a title for each of these major sections.

| Passage | Title |
|----------------|--------------|
| 29:31-35 | |
| 30:1-8 | |
| 30:9-13 | |
| 30:14-16 | |
| 30:17-21 | |
| 30:22-24 | |

Leah's First Four Sons (29:31-35)

3. What are the contrasts between Leah and Rachel in 29:30-31.

With the naming of each son in 29:32 - 30:24, there is short reflection on the circumstances surrounding the birth and the son is named. The names do not necessarily 'mean' what has been said. Often, they are more a play on words, or have a similar sound, rather than conveying the meaning directly. Sometimes there is a dual explanation given for the name.

4. **Son Reason for Name**

Reuben

Simeon

Levi

Judah

5. What do the comments Leah makes when she names her sons tell you?

Leah stopped having children. (29:35) She may have become infertile (temporarily - see 30:9, 17) or perhaps sexual relationships between Jacob and Leah had ceased (see 30:15-16) as he favoured Rachel. In either case, the

comments after the birth of each son highlight Leah's longing for Jacob's affection. Although she had children, she did not have his love. Rachel, on the other hand, had Jacob's love but longed for children. (30:1)

Rachel's Sons Through Her Maidservant *Bilhah* (30:1-8)

The previous section opened with the words 'When the LORD saw...' (29:31). This section opens with the words 'When Rachel saw...' (30:1).

6. What is Rachel's reaction to God's kindness to Leah? What should have been her reaction?

7. What does Jacob's response tell you?

Rachel is set on solving her problems by her own devices. Surrogate motherhood was not uncommon in this time. Have a look at chapter 16 for the earlier use of surrogate motherhood by Jacob's grandmother.

8. How does Rachel's response to the child born of the maidservant compare to Sarah's? (30:6; 16:6)

9. **Son Reason for Name**

Dan

Naphtali

10. What do the comments Rachel makes when she names her sons through Bilhah tell you?

In 30:6 Rachel says that God has listened to her plea. There is no mention of her praying in the preceding verses, but Rachel saw the birth of Dan as an answer to prayer. It is not until 30:22 that we are told ‘God listened to her.’

Leah’s Sons Through Her Maidservant Zilpah (30:9-13)

‘When Leah saw...’ (30:9 compare 29:31; 30:1). Rachel’s triumph is short lived. ‘Anything you can do, I can do better,’ may well have been Leah’s response, ‘I can bear children myself *and* through my maidservant.’

11. **Son Reason for Name**

Gad

Asher

12. What do the comments Leah makes when she names her sons through Zilpah tell you?

Reflections

Read Proverbs 14:30; 1 Corinthians 13:4 & 1 Peter 2:1-3

13. How do they apply to the what’s happening here in Genesis 29:31 - 30:24?

14. What do you learn about yourself?
In what way are you like Jacob or Leah or Rachel?
Is there something you need to change?

15. What do we learn about God so far in this section?

16. How is God keeping the promises made to Jacob at Bethel (28:13-15)?

Mandrakes (30:14-16)

This short scene brings into the open the long-simmering dispute between the sisters.

17. What did Reuben find? What are they? Why does Rachel want some of them? (30:14)

Since the third century BC, the Hebrew word here has been understood as ‘mandrakes.’ The mandrake (*Mandragora autumnalis*) is a perennial Mediterranean plant that bears bluish flowers in winter and yellow plum-sized fruit in summer. In ancient time they were famed for their aphrodisiac qualities and as a fertility drug. (See also Song of Songs 7:13.) Whatever the plant is, it seems clear that Rachel and Leah valued it as a fertility drug - Rachel, because she had never had children, and Leah, because she had become infertile.

18. What does the exchange between the sisters tell us about their relationship with each other and with Jacob?

Although Rachel says that she has triumphed over her sister in having children through Bilhah, she still really wants children of her own.

Leah's Last Two Sons and a Daughter (30:17-21)

19. **Son** **Reason for Name**

Issachar

Zebulun

20. What do the comments Leah makes when she names each of her sons tell you?

Leah also has a daughter, Dinah (30:21). It is only a brief mention compared to the sons and foreshadows her later appearance in chapter 34.

Rachel's Sons (30:22-24)

These couple of verses bring this episode to a happy ending, not through the mandrakes, but through the mercy of God, as he 'remembered Rachel.' (30:22).

For completeness, jump ahead to 35:16-18 for the birth of Rachel's second son to complete the table.

21. **Son** **Reason for Name**

Joseph

Ben...

22. What do the comments Rachel makes when she names her sons tell you?

This episode ends in the way it began - with God opening the womb (29:31; 30:22). The framework of the story implies that it is at least seven years after the marriage that Rachel bears her first child and Jacob's thoughts are now turning to home (30:25).

Reflections

23. You may wish to revisit the earlier reflection questions, questions 13-16.

Concluding Remarks

We have been given a few snapshots of Jacob's bigamous marriage. From the start it appears to have been stormy as Jacob 'loved Rachel more than Leah' (29:30). Jacob does not seem to have forgiven Laban for his deception, and he favours Rachel. This will impact the next generation as we see in the story of favoured Joseph.

Both Leah and Rachel want what the other has and their feelings are given expression though this part of the story as they both use underhand tactics to promote their own goals. But through it all, it is God who is in control. It is he, the narrator insists, who opened Leah's womb and then Rachel's. This is a story of the triumph of God's power over human sinfulness.

It is into a bitterly divided family that the forefathers of the twelve tribes were born. Their father was a deceiver, their mothers were less than ideal, and they themselves were less than perfect. Yet through them the promises first made to Abraham took a great step toward their fulfilment, showing again that it is divine grace and not human merit that gives us hope of salvation.

Prayer

Give thanks to God for his grace in fulfilling his promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Study 8 - Genesis 30:25 - 31:16

Jacob Outwits Laban

Getting Started

1. 'Don't get mad, get even!' Is this a good philosophy?

In this story of shady business dealings and ingenious stockbreeding, we see Jacob, so long exploited by his uncle and father-in-law, Laban, turning the tables and preparing to return to the land of promise.

Read Genesis 30:25-43.

2. Give a title for each of the two major sections and the final verse.

| <u>Passage</u> | <u>Title</u> |
|----------------|--------------|
| 30:25-36 | |
| 30:37-42 | |
| 30:43 | |

The Negotiations (30:25-36)

3. What is the trigger for Jacob to return to his homeland? (30:25-26)

Jacob demands permission from his father-in-law to return home. He echoes the words of Abraham's servant to Laban back in 24:54-56.

4. How does Laban's response then compare with his response this time? (30:27-28)

Laban politely rejects Jacob's request. 'If I have found favour in your eyes' is a slightly over-eager way of addressing a superior (eg 18:3; 19:19; 33:10; 50:4) but here he uses it to butter up his enslaved nephew.

Divination (that is the discovering of unknown information with the aid of spiritual powers) is later prohibited in the law (eg Deut 18:10-14; Lev 19:26). 'Learned by divination' may be translated as 'have become rich'. This is preferred by some commentators because they doubt that Laban would have resorted to divination when things were going so well.

Whether by divination or not, Laban recognises that the LORD has blessed him because of Jacob's presence with him. That all families of the earth will be blessed through Abraham and his offspring is central to God's promises (eg 12:3; 22:18; 28:14). Although we understand that Christ is the ultimate fulfilment of this promise, this is one of several incidents in Genesis where outsiders recognise that God's blessing does rest on Abraham's family and those associated with them (eg 21:22-23; 26:12-16, 28-29; 39:5, 20b-23).

5. With this recognition, what is Laban's response to Jacob's request to leave? (30:27-28)

‘Name your wages, and I will pay them,’ is not an offer to pay him what he wants if he stays, but rather, ‘Name the wages I owe you, so I can pay you.’ According to the wedding agreements (29:18, 27) Laban owes Jacob nothing. If Jacob wants to leave with anything more than Leah and Rachel he will have to stay longer.

6. What is Jacob’s response? (30:29-30)

Laban’s question in verse 31a, ‘What shall I give you?’ is probably not as generous as it sounds. In response Jacob makes a very modest suggestion.

7. What is the payment requested by Jacob for continuing to shepherd Laban’s flock? (30:31-33)

8. Jacob appeals to his own honesty (30:33). Is he really planning to be honest? Has the deceiver changed or is this further deception?

Not surprisingly Laban accepts this favourable deal as multi-coloured sheep and goats were relatively rare and Laban expected Jacob to get less than the usual 20% of newborn lambs and kids that ancient shepherds received as their wages.

9. A deal seems to have been struck (30:34), but what does Laban do? (30:35-36)

The Breeding Program (30:37-42)

10. Following Laban's removal of the sheep to sway the agreement even more in his favour, what does Jacob do?

The details of Jacob's methods are a little obscure and in the light of modern genetics, one principle sounds rather strange but the other is rather sound.

11. What are the two principles behind Jacob's breeding program?

The Result (30:43)

Laban had removed the animals that were Jacob's payment, and so minimised the chance that any kids and lambs would be born multi-coloured. However, Jacob comprehensively outwitted Laban and succeeded in breeding multi-coloured sheep and goats from the monochrome stock, and these were transferred into his ownership. Not only that, he also ensured that his stock were the strong ones.

12. How is Jacob's position summed up in 30:43?
13. How does this compare with his what happened to his grandfather Abraham in 12:16, and his father Isaac in 26:12-14?

14. How does what has happened to Jacob relate to God's promise to him in 28:14-15?

Now well established, Jacob is in a much better position to return to his homeland than he was when he approached Laban at the start of this episode (30:25 and 31:3).

Jacob the Deceiver?

15. How did you answer the question 8 about Jacob's appeal to his honesty?

We remember Jacob as the deceiver (27:36) and therefore may doubt his appeal to his honesty in this passage.

16. Has his encounter with God at Bethel and the fourteen years he has been working for Laban changed him?

Read Genesis 31:1-18.

17. Give a title for each of the three main sections.

| <u>Passage</u> | <u>Title</u> |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
|-----------------------|---------------------|

31:1-3

31:4-16

31:17-18

The Reasons for Returning Home (31:1-3)

18. What caused the negative attitudes of his relatives?
(30:43 - 31:1)
19. Why does Jacob return home? (31:1-3)
20. How does this compare with his reasons for wanting to leave some six years earlier? (30:25)
21. Compare the promise of 31:3 with the promise some twenty years earlier in 28:13-15.

Leah and Rachel Agree to Leave (31:4-16)

With Laban's family ganging up against him, Jacob must be sure he that his wives will side with him and not their father.

22. Compare what Laban has done to Jacob with what God has done for him.

Jacob speaks of a dream that he 'once had.' It sounds as if it was some years ago. Some scholars think it was before he embarked on the selective breeding program, others that it was sometime during the six years of the program. Jacob seems to be referring to the dream in order to show that it is God who is behind the program and to back up his statement in 31:9. (See also 31:7b, 16)

23. Why does God refer to himself as the God of Bethel in 31:13? (See 28:10-22)
24. If this dream was some time earlier, why has Jacob delayed in obeying the 'at once' of 31:13?
25. How is Laban presented in this passage? What is God's comment on him? (31:12)
26. How do Laban's daughters regard him? (31:14-16)

God is in Control

27. What have we learnt about Jacob so far?

Laban cheated Jacob out of Rachel on his wedding day. This led to seven years of family strife and sorrow. Upon Jacob's request to return home, Laban refuses to compensate him for his years of service even though they have been profitable for him. However, Jacob, with the LORD's help, finally outmanoeuvres Laban, not by deception, but by sticking to the terms of the agreement they negotiated, even when Laban changed it. (See Job 5:12-13)

In 30:25-43 and 31:1-16 it seems Jacob is presented as the one who is deceived and cheated by Laban, rather than the other way round. (See also 31:38-42.) This part of the story makes no explicit comment on Jacob as a deceiver as it has earlier (27:36).

Jacob is far from perfect, and whether or not his motives are altogether pure in this instance we can't really be sure. Whatever the case, the selective breeding program has been made successful by God, and Jacob is in a position to return to his homeland. (28:15, 31:3)

29. What do you learn about yourself?
In what way are you like Jacob or Laban?
Is there something you need to change?

30. When is it right to stick up for yourself?
Do the ends justify the means?

31. What does this story tell you about God?

The story of Jacob's genetic engineering, both by itself, and as part of the larger patriarchal story, makes clear that God is not frustrated by the sinfulness of humanity, and that his promises to his people of land, offspring, blessing and protection (here personified in Jacob) will triumph despite all opposition. This story once again reveals God's sovereignty in carrying out his redemptive plan for the world.

Prayer

Pray that we will grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever! Amen. (2 Peter 3:18)

Study 9 - Genesis 31:17 - 32:2

Jacob Leaves Laban

Getting Started

1. What do you do when faced with possible confrontation?
Meet it head on? Avoid it? Something else?

Delay and disappointment characterised Jacob's stay in Paddan-Aram. He planned to stay 'a few days' (27:44) which lengthened to seven years as he worked for Rachel. Then, deceived by Laban, he worked another seven years. When Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob requested permission to leave (30:25). When Laban refused to give Jacob a golden handshake, Jacob worked another six years to acquire enough wealth to make the break and return to his homeland. Now, twenty years after leaving home, he at last manages to set out to return.

Read Genesis 31:17 - 32:2.

2. Give a title for each of the sections.

| <u>Passage</u> | <u>Title</u> |
|----------------|--------------|
| 31:17-21 | |
| 31:22-24 | |
| 31:25-44 | |
| 31:45-55 | |
| 32:1-2 | |

The Departure (31:17-21)

The narrative has no detail in terms of timing, but gives the impression of a hasty departure, though undoubtedly it was still a major undertaking (30:43; 31:18).

3. Why is Jacob able to make his get-away unnoticed?
(See 31:19a, 22)

4. What are the ‘household gods’ and why did Rachel steal them? (31:19)

5. What does the presence of the household gods tell us about Laban and his family’s relationship with the LORD? (See also 30:17; 31:29; 35:2) What about Rachel’s relationship with the LORD?

6. What might be the equivalent of ‘household gods’ for us? See 1 Corinthians 8:4 and 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

In 31:20 we read that “Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean”. A different word is used for ‘deceive’ than in 29:25. The word used here and in 31:26 literally means ‘stole the heart of’ and is a pun on ‘Aramean’ implying that Laban is the arch deceiver.

7. What do we learn about Jacob from this deception of Laban?

Laban's Pursuit (31:22-24)

Jacob has a three day start on Laban, so it is ten days after the departure that Laban finally catches up with Jacob.

8. Why does God appear to Laban in a dream? (31:24. See also 31:29 and 31:5-7)

Confrontation (31:25-44)

Note the irony of the word of Laban (31:26) when compared with the words of Jacob some thirteen years earlier (29:25).

9. What are Laban's two complaints? (31:27-28, 30)
10. What is Jacob's response to the two complaints of Laban? (31:31-32)

Whilst conceding a breach of etiquette, Jacob launches a counter-attack on Laban accusing him of wanting to steal his daughters, and denying that the household gods have been stolen by his party. With the pronouncement of the death-penalty (unknowingly) on Rachel, the tension mounts.

But Rachel now gets in on the business of deception. (31:34-35) The words used for Laban's searching literally mean to 'feel all things' (31:34, 37). These words were used earlier in the Jacob story in another unsuccessful attempt to uncover a deception. (See 27:21-22).

11. How does Jacob respond? (31:36-42)

12. From Jacob's response, what is the significance of the whole Jacob-Laban story in Jacob's overall story?
See 31:42 and 31:7.

13. What is Laban's response? (31:43-44)

The Covenant (31:45-55)

Laban is trapped. Recognising that he can do nothing, he seeks to make a covenant with Jacob. The relative standing of Laban and Jacob is now to be fundamentally changed. Laban had pursued a nephew/son-in-law who was under his authority. Now they make a covenant that puts them on a more equal footing.

The exact meaning of the intricacies of this ceremony are hard to determine, though some sense can still be made of goings on.

Pillars (31:45) occur at significant points in Jacob's life. See 28:18 and 35:14, 20. Here a 'pillar' and a 'heap' are set up (31:45-46).

14. From the names given, (31:47, see footnotes) and Laban's comments (31:48) what is the purpose of the heap? See also 31:51-52.

15. In 31:49-50 we have another name. What does it tell us?

16. What does Laban's invocation in 31:53 tell us about his religion?

17. How does this compare with Jacob's oath?
Why does he call God, 'The Fear of his father Isaac'?
Has Jacob grown in the last 20 years?

18. How does fear relate to the 'household gods'? See also Joshua 24:2, 14-15

19. What does it mean for us as Christians to fear the Lord?
Some NT references: Acts 9:31; Hebrews 12:28b-29;
Philippians 2:12-13

20. What is the relationship between Laban and Jacob now?

The covenant was concluded (as customary in the ancient world) with a sacrifice and a meal. The next morning there is an amicable parting as Laban returns home.

Jacob and Angels (32:1-2)

Now as Jacob presses on towards Canaan, he is met by ‘the angels of God’ recalling an earlier significant event. (28:12) The reference to the angels is extremely brief, and it would appear to leave things intact if it were left out.

21. What is the point of 31:1b-2?
What would have this meant to Jacob?

Concluding

22. What does all this tell us about God?

23. What have you learnt about yourself?

This part of Jacob’s story shows us God’s sovereign protection of his chosen. Despite Jacob’s tactlessness and self-seeking, God has kept the promise he made at Bethel (28:15). Jacob is now nearing Canaan and must be wondering about his likely meeting with Esau. Will he really return to the land as promised? No verbal assurance is given, but the ‘angels of God met him.’ Having been reminded of his encounter with God at Bethel, Jacob heads for home.

Prayer

Pray that you will grow in your relationship with God, through your journey.

Study 10 - Genesis 32:3 - 33:20

Jacob Returns Esau's Blessing

Getting Started

1. Does time heal all wounds?

Jacob is now on his way back to his homeland, the promised land of Canaan. But this means he will have to face his twin brother, Esau, whom he deceived some twenty years earlier. Does Esau still want to kill him, or can there be reconciliation?

Read Genesis 32:3 - 33:20.

2. Give a title for each of the sections.

| Passage | Title |
|----------------|--------------|
| 32:3-21 | |
| 32:22-32 | |
| 33:1-17 | |
| 33:18-20 | |

Jacob Prepares to Meet Esau (32:3-21)

3. Why does Jacob send messengers to Esau? (32:3)

4. What does Jacob's language in 32:4-5 suggest about how he is feeling?
5. Why would he be feeling this way? (See 27:41-45)

The word 'favour' or 'grace' (32:5) appears frequently in chapter 33, particularly the phrase 'find favour in your eyes' which occurs in 33:8, 10 & 5. The associated verb 'be gracious' occurs in 33:5 & 11.

6. What is Jacob's response to the news that Esau is coming to meet him and what does he do about it? (32:7-8, 9-12)
7. How does Jacob address God (32:9a) and how does this compare with God's self-disclosure in 28:13 ?
8. What does Jacob add in 32:9b and what does that tell us?
9. What is the basis of Jacob's plea that he and his family should be saved? (32:11-12, and see 28:13-15)
10. In Jacob's prayer, what do learn about his relationship with God?

Having prayed, Jacob takes urgent steps to send a series of gifts to Esau. (32:20b)

11. Why is he doing this and why does he send the gifts in groups?

The word for ‘gift’ (32:13, 18, 20, 21) can imply a ‘gift that ingratiates’ and as Jacob says, he wants to find favour with his brother (32:5, 33:8, 10). The word, however, is also used as a term for sacrifice (eg Lev 2) and Jacob speaks in sacrificial language. The word ‘pacify’ in 32:20 can also mean ‘make atonement’ as in Lev 1:4. Also in Lev 1:4, we see the same word used for the acceptance of the atoning sacrifice as Jacob uses in 33:10.

12. How does this action line up with the pious prayer of the previous verses? Is it a sign of doubt, faith, fear, pragmatism or something else?

2. Jacob Wrestles with a Man (32:22-32)

Having sent his gifts on, it is not clear why Jacob rises in the night to have his family and the rest of his possessions cross the Jabbok and then apparently return to the other side by himself. (The Jabbok is a fast-flowing tributary of the Jordan which flows westward to join it some 35km north of the Dead Sea.) Whatever the reason ‘Jacob was left alone’ (32:24).

13. What do you make of this brief account of Jacob's wrestling match?
14. What is the significance of the changing of Jacob's name?
15. What is the significance of Jacob's naming the place Peniel? (See also Ex 33:18-20)

The word 'wrestled' is a play on words with 'Jabbok', and possibly with 'Jacob' as well. Although Jacob's opponent is described as 'a man', we find out in 32:28 & 30 that it is in fact God, or, at the very least, the angel of God. (Note 31:10-13 where the angel of God then speaks as God. See also Exodus 3:2-4. See also Hosea 12:3-4.)

It seems strange, then, that 'the man could not overpower him' (32:25) and that he demands to be let go (32:26). The touch that wrenches (or dislocates) the hip speaks of supernatural power and so Jacob, the one always interested in blessing, demands a blessing. To give blessing, the blesser must know who they are blessing, and although it is superfluous for Jacob's opponent to ask his name, in divulging his name, Jacob also divulges his character and his guilt. (27:36). Rather than simply blessing him however, Jacob's opponent changes his name and in so doing, announces his new character and destiny.

Israel literally means 'God fights' and the name is given 'because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.' (32:28).

The name given to Jacob was also to be the name of the nation, and when the nation of Israel recalled the naming, it no doubt gave them hope that they too could be able to overcome.

The transformation of Jacob into Israel, the father of the nation, that takes place is momentous. The man who cheated his brother out of his blessing is now concerned that he is about to meet that brother again and prays to God not to leave him in the lurch. The nighttime struggle, the unexpected conclusion, the gracious blessing and bestowal of a new name is God's answer to the deceiver Jacob. God's sovereignty and faithfulness to his promise, despite human unworthiness, is demonstrated. Although in one sense, Jacob was victorious, God has left his mark and Jacob/Israel is totally dependent on God's grace.

16. How does this encounter with God compare to the encounter at Bethel? What is the relationship between them? Would you call either of them a 'conversion' experience?

3. Jacob and Esau are Reunited (33:1-17)

The telling of the wrestling with God has delayed the telling of the reunion of the brothers, and at the same time has prepared the way for it.

17. Why does Jacob divide the children into groups? (33:2) Is his reason any different from 32:7-8 ?

18. How does Jacob's bowing to Esau (33:3) relate to the blessing that Isaac mistakenly gave Jacob instead of Esau? (27:27-29).

19. What strikes you about Jacob and Esau's meeting? (33:4)

20. Why is Esau reluctant to accept gifts from Jacob? (33:9) Why does Jacob insist on giving them? (33:10-11)

21. Why does Jacob compare seeing Esau's face to seeing the face of God (as he had just done)?

Note the use of sacrificial language – 'accept this gift' and 'you have received me favourably' - in 33:10 as mentioned above. When Jacob asks Esau to accept the 'present', the word is literally 'blessing', the same word as used in 27:35. Jacob is attempting to return the blessing he stole from Esau as best he can and to undo the sin of twenty years earlier.

Esau responds to Jacob's gifts by inviting him to come with him to Seir (presumably to settle there with him).

22. Why does Jacob reject the offer to come with Esau, and even the offer of some men?

On a relatively positive note the brothers, now reconciled, go their separate ways, though still with some uneasiness in their relationship. There appears to be some lack of trust in Jacob in his refusal to go with Esau to Seir. For Jacob it is simply enough that he has found favour from Esau (33:15).

4. Conclusion and Preview (33:18-20)

23. What significant event does 33:18 record? (See 28:15.)

24. How do the actions of Jacob on arrival compare with Abraham's in 12:5-9?

25. Why does Jacob call the altar El Elohe Israel?

Although he not yet back at Bethel, he is partly fulfilling his vow made there (28:20-22). These verses, with their mention of Shechem look back to Abraham and also lead in to what will follow in chapter 34.

Reflections

26. How does Esau appear in this part of the story?

What about Jacob?

27. What does this story tell us about giving and receiving forgiveness? See also Matthew 18:21-35 and Colossians 3:12-14.

28. Apart from 33:20, why is Jacob still being referred to as Jacob despite the name change in 32:28? Has Jacob changed with his change of name?

Jacob's experience at Jabbok - wrestling with God yet surviving - was in later times seen as summing up the national experience of Israel. Among all their trials in which God seemed to be fighting against them, he was ultimately on their side. God would triumph and in his victory, Israel would triumph too.

And so Jacob returns to Canaan, buys land there, makes his home there and worships El the God of Israel. The story seems to have reached its destination: Israel has settled in the land promised to Abraham, but in what appears as resolution, there is the making of another crisis which will unfold in the following chapter.

Prayer

Pray that God would help you to give and to receive forgiveness.

