

**Jacob: Two Significant Encounters**

Passages: Gen 28:10–15; Gen 32:24–32

*Memory Verse*

“And He said, ‘Let Me go, for the day breaks.’ But he said, ‘I will not let You go unless You bless me!’ ”  
(Genesis 32:26)

<b>Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]</b>	<b>Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]</b>	<b>Good Works [Behavior]</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. God came to Jacob in times of distress, establishing a covenant and giving him strength.</li><li>2. God changed Jacob’s name to Israel, which means prince of God.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. God provides.</li><li>2. God comforts.</li><li>3. God guides.</li><li>4. God is omnipresent.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Know God’s presence.</li><li>2. Respond in faith by building our altar.</li><li>3. Persist in our prayers until we receive God’s blessing.</li></ol>

*Overview*

**Events and Spiritual Teachings**

- A. Jacob’s Dream at Bethel
- B. Jacob Wrestles with God

**Life Application**

1. Know God’s Presence
2. Respond in Faith by Building Our Altar
3. “I will not let You go until You bless me!”

**Memory Verse**

**Conclusion:** We need to learn from Jacob’s active faith and do our best to return God’s care with our actions. To do so, we must persevere with our prayers and consistently rely on God in times of distress.

## *Spiritual Teachings*

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### **A. Jacob's Dream at Bethel**

Jacob had to travel from Beersheba in the southern part of Canaan to Haran, which was in northern Mesopotamia, east of the Euphrates River. It was over 400 miles away. It would have taken him perhaps three or four days of constant travel to reach Luz, where he stopped to rest. While he rested, he dreamed of a stairway that reached heaven. Let's examine this event in detail.

Do you remember why Jacob was traveling to Haran? After tricking his father and taking Esau's birthright, Esau threatened to kill him, so Jacob's mother sent him to his uncle. He was likely homeless, scared, and alone. And after traveling for so many days, it is only natural that he would need to rest. When he fell asleep in Luz with only a rock for a pillow, he had a dream. Let's read about this dream in Genesis 28:13–15.

*And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: "I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."*

There is a beautiful teaching in this dream. In it, God introduced Himself as "the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac." He wanted Jacob to know that He had a very intimate relationship with both Jacob's father and his grandfather, and that He wanted a close relationship and covenant with Jacob as well. There are several promises and words of comfort that God gave to Jacob during this dream. What were they? Let's examine each verse one by one.

- Verse 13: God reminded Jacob that he was the God of Abraham his grandfather and Isaac his father. He promised to give Jacob the land that he was lying on, not only for Jacob, but for his descendants as well.
- Verse 14: God promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the dust of the earth, and that all families would be blessed through him and his offspring. God also said that his family would spread out to many parts of the world, indicating how abundantly blessed he would be.
- Verse 15: The most comforting words that Jacob heard was when God promised to be with him at all times, never leaving him. Nothing could be more powerful than knowing God would always be present.

### **The Significance of God's Promise**

Jacob's dream signifies the establishment of the eternal covenant between God and Jacob and his descendants. The words "behold, the Lord stood above it" means that through the covenant, Jacob and his descendants would be God's people, and the Lord would be their God. The descending and ascending angels indicated God's constant presence. They are His ministering spirits, sent by God to guide, protect, and to keep (Ex 23:20).

### **Jacob's Reaction**

Let's read Genesis 28:16–17. "Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely, the LORD is in this place and I did not know it.' And he was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!' " Why do you think Jacob was afraid? Why did he not know the Lord was present? (*Allow students to answer.*) Most likely due to the worries of life, Jacob was

unaware of the Lord's presence. He was not close to God, and though he was likely comforted to learn that God was with him, he was probably also afraid because he had not realized that God was already there.

Jacob had run because of his brother's wrath, and he likely knew that what he had done was not pleasing to God. This dream made him realize that he may have been able to run away from people, but he could not run from God. God meant every word, so He would always be present in his life. What did Jacob say and do in response to this understanding? Let's continue reading verses 18–22.

- Verse 18: Jacob took the stone that he had rested his head on and set it up as a pillar for God.
- Verse 19: He changed the name of the place from Luz to Bethel, which means the "House of God."
- Verses 20–21: Jacob made a vow to worship God because of God's care, provision, and protection.
- Verse 22: Jacob proclaimed that the pillar he had set up would be God's house, and he would give a tenth of all he earned to God.

This dream was clearly a turning point in Jacob's life. We can see this in the vow that he made, as well as in the new name that he gave the place. Setting up the pillar and pouring oil on it was an expression of worship. He was thanking God for His blessings and guidance, and the action represented Jacob's new trust and faith in God and His promises. But what is the significance of his vow? The vow that Jacob made can be broken down into three parts:

**1. A plea for God's providence**

"If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on..."

**2. Personal commitment to God**

"...so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God."

**3. His own promise towards God**

"And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

At this point of his life, Jacob was filled with fear, hopelessness, and uncertainty regarding his journey and his future. In a time of deep distress, God not only gave him a dream, but also established a covenant to comfort, lead, and guide him. In response, Jacob appealed for God's providence as a sign of his trust, personally committed himself to God as a sign of his faith, and offered a lifelong tithe as a sign of his thanksgiving. He established a new and more intimate relationship with God.

**B. Jacob Wrestles with God**

Jacob's second significant encounter with God happened much later. After twenty years, Jacob left Padan Aram to go back home to Canaan. However, Jacob and Esau had not parted on good terms. He was afraid to meet his brother. To add to his fears, Esau was accompanied by 400 men (Gen 32:6). Therefore, out of fear, Jacob split up his entire household into two camps as a strategy to evade an attack and prevent the annihilation of his household. After he sent them over the brook of Jabbok, he stayed behind by himself. It was then that a Man showed up and wrestled with Jacob until daybreak. Let's read Genesis 32:24–32 to see the details.

Although God could easily have prevailed against Jacob, He did not. Instead, they wrestled until morning, at which point the Man touched the socket of Jacob's hip, causing it to be out of joint.

However, despite the pain, Jacob held on and refused to let Him go until He blessed Jacob. Because of his determination, Jacob received a new name. Let's examine this passage in closer detail.

**1. The significance of a name change**

In the Bible, a person's name was a reflection of their character. Jacob's name has several meanings: "heel catcher," "grabber," or "deceiver." For his entire life, he had lived up to this name, first by catching his brother's heel during their birth, then by grabbing hold of Esau's birthright by asking him to trade it for a bowl of stew. Later, Jacob was deceived into laboring twenty years for his uncle Laban, during which Jacob managed to outwit Laban and grow more prosperous than his uncle. But after Jacob struggled through the night, refusing to let go of God, He gave Jacob a new name: Israel. This name means "prince of God," or, "he who struggles with God." He changed Jacob's very identity, and as a result, the nation of Israel was named after him. Jacob was no longer a "heel catcher" or one who is deceived, but someone restored and renewed.

**2. Jacob refused to let Him go**

Why was Jacob so determined to receive God's blessing? He was full of fear and distress, and he dreaded Esau's retribution upon him and his family. Let's read 1 John 5:14–15. "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." Jacob's struggle with God showed his perseverance and determination in seeking God's blessing, and God answered his persistence with a reward: his faith was renewed, and he was blessed.

**3. Limping to rely on God**

It is never God's will that we run from our problems. With the limp that God gave him, Jacob could not use his own strength to face Esau and his 400 men, or to even run from them. But despite the limp, he was not afraid. With his limp, Jacob no longer stood by his own power, but by God's. He could no longer run, but relying on God's strength made him stronger.

**4. The meaning of wrestling**

Jacob's persistence teaches us about our attitude in prayer. When we persistently seek God through prayer, His help and strength will come. He will deliver us just as He delivered Jacob from Esau. When we are worried, fearful, or uncertain, we only need to cry out to God, and He will give us strength. All we need is the same persistence that Jacob had when wrestling with God through the night.

**5. Peniel**

Jacob called the place Peniel, "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." (Gen 32:30–31). His life was blessed with God's mercy after the encounter. He was ready to face the upcoming challenges ahead of him with God's help. His body may have been weakened, but he was spiritually transformed.

After such a transformative event, Jacob was no longer in distress or overwhelmed by fear. He stood before his families to face Esau, willing to sacrifice himself to face whatever consequence he needed to. This was indeed a big transformation and a change in his attitude. Let's read Genesis 33:3: "Then he crossed over before them and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his

brother.” Jacob clearly showed his respect and humility upon his arrival. He bowed not once, but seven times, indicating his transformation and desire to reconcile with his brother. Through the new strength he had received, he could face Esau with courage from God.

### *Life Application*

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#### **1. Know God’s Presence**

Like Jacob, we may at times try to hide or run from our problems and do whatever we can to protect ourselves. In the process, we may become afraid or lonely because we feel as though no one can help us. But it is during those times when God reveals Himself to us, allowing us to understand that we are never truly alone. Jacob’s first experience with God was very powerful, and he woke up knowing God would never leave him. Have you experienced the presence of God? Have you experienced His faithfulness? Let’s read how the Bible describes God’s faithfulness.

- “And He said, ‘My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.’ ” (Ex 33:14)
- “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ ” (Heb 13:5)
- “You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy [...]” (Ps 16:11)
- “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” (Ps 23:4)

These verses help us to understand the presence of God. If we abide in Him, He will abide with us, and He will always be with us. When was the last time you felt the presence of God as Jacob did?

#### **2. Respond in Faith by Building Our Altar**

We may have had brief brushes with God in our journey of faith. They may have been through powerful prayers, moving sermons, or miracles. Whatever the method, all are various experiences that God gives us in times of need. But many of those times, we simply leave it as that: just an experience. It may live inside of us for days, maybe weeks, at best, but Jacob was stirred enough to take lasting action.

Jacob did not just accept God’s reassurances and then go on his way. Instead of just accepting it as an experience, he responded with both action and a personal vow to turn his life into a living testimony of God’s care. He allowed this encounter to deepen his personal relationship with the Lord. But what is the meaning of building an altar for us today?

Our altar to God is a place of worship, thanksgiving, offering, and intercession. Perhaps it is a certain time of day in your own room, or perhaps it is your family altar, when you gather to read the Bible and pray together. It can even be a room in your heart and mind, a place where you pour out your worries and fears to God, no matter where you are. But regardless, it is a place where we go to build up our relationship with God.

**Discussion:** Do you have a personal altar that you have built? How often do you go there? Do you give tithe to God on a consistent basis with a cheerful heart? How did God pour out His blessings to you after giving tithe?

#### **3. “I will not let You go until You bless me!”**

Change is never easy, but if we are willing to submit ourselves to God, then we have to learn why we must wrestle with God in prayer. Prayer can be a real battle of wills. Would you be willing to wrestle with God in prayer with persistence, like Jacob? Jacob did not quit until God blessed him. Will you also persist in your prayers until God blesses you? Do you truly believe that He will touch, change, and bless

you through your prayers? At times, it seems as if He isn't listening at all. In those times, how do we eventually receive God's blessing, as Jacob did?

### **Receiving God's Blessings**

#### **a. Admit we have a need**

In Genesis 32:9–12, Jacob said to God, "Save me, I pray! For I am afraid." He was afraid of facing Esau. That was the starting point for Jacob. Nothing happens in our lives until we reach the realization: "I cannot solve this on my own. I cannot face my struggles on my own. Dear God, I need Your help!" Jacob admitted that he had a need, and God blesses those who realize their need for him.

#### **b. Ask for deliverance**

Jacob asked for deliverance by asking God to save him. When we face overwhelming trials, we finally realize that we need God's deliverance. We need to cry out to God and ask for help. Do I trust God to take care of the situation? Do I trust God to deliver me from the danger? Do I ask God for direction and try to do the right thing, even if I can't see the big picture yet?

#### **c. Focus on God**

In our prayers, God wants you to think about Him and focus on Him. Psalm 105:4 says, "Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face evermore!" Jacob was so worried and fearful about his brother, and that was the moment God came to him and initiated the match. The physical conflict drew Jacob out of his fear and forced him to focus on God. God is the source of everything we need. That's why we go to Him and focus on Him despite the struggles that we face. When we do that, our anxieties will fade away in comparison to God's power and glory.

#### **d. Go deep into our prayers**

Most people miss God's providence because they give up too soon. They don't make it till daybreak because they give up on the struggle early on. They may think something like, "Forget it! It isn't worth it! I pray and pray, but God never answers my prayers!" But Jacob refused to let go until God blessed him and struggled with him until daybreak. The longer we pray, the deeper our prayers become. When you wrestle with God in your prayers and allow Him to work deep within you, He will change you. Don't avoid the fear, conflict, or pain, but pray with it all and direct your anxieties to God. Like Jacob, we must never give up or stop praying.

#### **e. Continue to trust in God**

The muscle that God shrank in Jacob is one of the strongest muscles in the human body. God reduced the point of his greatest physical strength, and in doing so, told him that he would no longer rely on himself anymore, but on God. Jacob's struggles may have seemed to be with his father-in-law and his brother, but his biggest struggle was actually with God. He had been running all his life, but instead of running away, he needed to learn to trust and rely on God. Likewise, we also need to trust that God will mold and change us according to His will.

### **Questions to reflect upon:**

- God desires for us to wrestle with Him in prayer, just as Jacob did. When was the last time you spent all night praying? At times, we may feel discouraged. This week, try planning one day where you can pray for a longer time than usual. Pray for yourself, for your family, and for your

unsaved friends whose hearts are unreceptive to the gospel.

- Make a list of things you need to pray for. Pray for the strength you need to overcome whatever sin you repeatedly struggle with, such as lust, pride, fear, greed, doubt, gossip, or bitterness. Ask God to renew your mind and spirit. Ask Him to help you get rid of sinful habits that interfere with your prayers.

### *Check for Understanding*

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1. **Name one promise that God told Jacob in his dream.** God promised Jacob the land that he was lying on to him and his descendants. He promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the dust of the earth. He also promised that all families would be blessed through him and his offspring, and they would spread out to many parts of the world.
2. **What words of comfort did God offer to Jacob in his dream?** God promised to always be with him.
3. **What was the result of the wrestling with God until the breaking of the day?** God rewarded Jacob's persistence and blessed him by changing his name to Israel.
4. **What can we learn from Jacob's limp?** It meant that Jacob had to rely on God, rather than on himself.

### *Memory Verse*

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"And He said, 'Let Me go, for the day breaks.' But he said, 'I will not let You go unless You bless me!' "  
(Genesis 32:26)

### **Meaning**

This verse teaches us what our attitude should be when we pray. Praying persistently is never a one-time event. We need to pray at all times and pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17). When we focus our entire being on God, we will not grow weary in prayers.

### *Conclusion*

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The Lord approached Jacob in times of distress, reassuring him and offering comfort. Jacob responded each time and deepened his relationship with God, at first offering what he could in return, then accepting God's sovereignty and refusing to let go until God blessed him. We need to learn from Jacob's active faith, and do our best to return God's care with our actions. To do so, we must persevere with our prayers and consistently rely on God in times of distress.

Lesson 8 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What does the memory verse teach us about our attitude when we pray?  
*Our attitude when we pray should be persistent and determined. We need to focus our entire being on God, and we will not grow weary in our prayer.*
2. "So Jacob called the name of the place \_\_\_\_\_. 'For I have \_\_\_\_\_ God face to face, and my life is \_\_\_\_\_.'" (Genesis 32:30)  
*Peniel, seen, preserved*
3. How did Jacob respond after his dream? Why is this significant?  
*Jacob built an altar, and then he made a promise to God. This is significant because Jacob was not merely letting the dream remain an experience; he was actively deepening his relationship with God.*
4. What can we learn about the limp that the Lord gave to Jacob?  
*It is never God's will that we run from our problems. With the limp that God gave him, Jacob could not use his own strength anymore. He no longer stood by his own power, but God's.*
5. Have you built an altar for God in your life? Explain. If not, how can you build one up now?  
*Personal answers.*
6. How can you change your faith to an active one like Jacob's?  
*Personal answers.*