

# Genesis: The Book of Beginnings

Focus	Four Great Events								Four Great Persons				
<b>Divisions</b>	1	2	3	4	5	9	10	11	12	25:19	27	37:2b	50
	<b>Creation</b>		<b>Fall</b>		<b>Flood</b>		<b>Nations (Babel)</b>		<b>Abraham</b>	<b>Isaac</b>	<b>Jacob</b>	<b>Joseph</b>	
<b>Topics</b>	<b>Primeval History of Humanity</b>								<b>Patriarchal History of Israel</b>				
	<b>Beginning of the Human Race</b>								<b>Beginning of the Hebrew Race</b>				
<b>Locations</b>	<b>East (Eden to Ur)</b>								<b>West (Canaan to Egypt)</b>				
<b>Time</b>	<b>2,000 + years (20% of Genesis)</b>								<b>About 286 years (80% of Genesis)</b>				

**Author:** Moses

**Date written:** after 1445 BC

**Theme:** Israel's Origin & Early Years

**Purposes:** 1) to present the beginning of everything but God  
 2) to record God's choice of Israel & His covenant plan for the nation  
 3) to show how the sin of man is met by the redemption of God



# The Book of Genesis

1:1-2:3 – The Creation of the Heavens and the Earth

2:4-4:26 – The Generations of the Heavens and the Earth

5:1-6:8 – The Generations of Adam

6:9-9:29 – The Generations of Noah

10:1-11:9 – The Generations of Shem, Ham and Japheth

11:10-26 – The Generations of Shem

11:27-25:11 – The Generations of Terah

25:12-18 – The Generations of Ishmael

25:19-35:29 – The Generations of Isaac

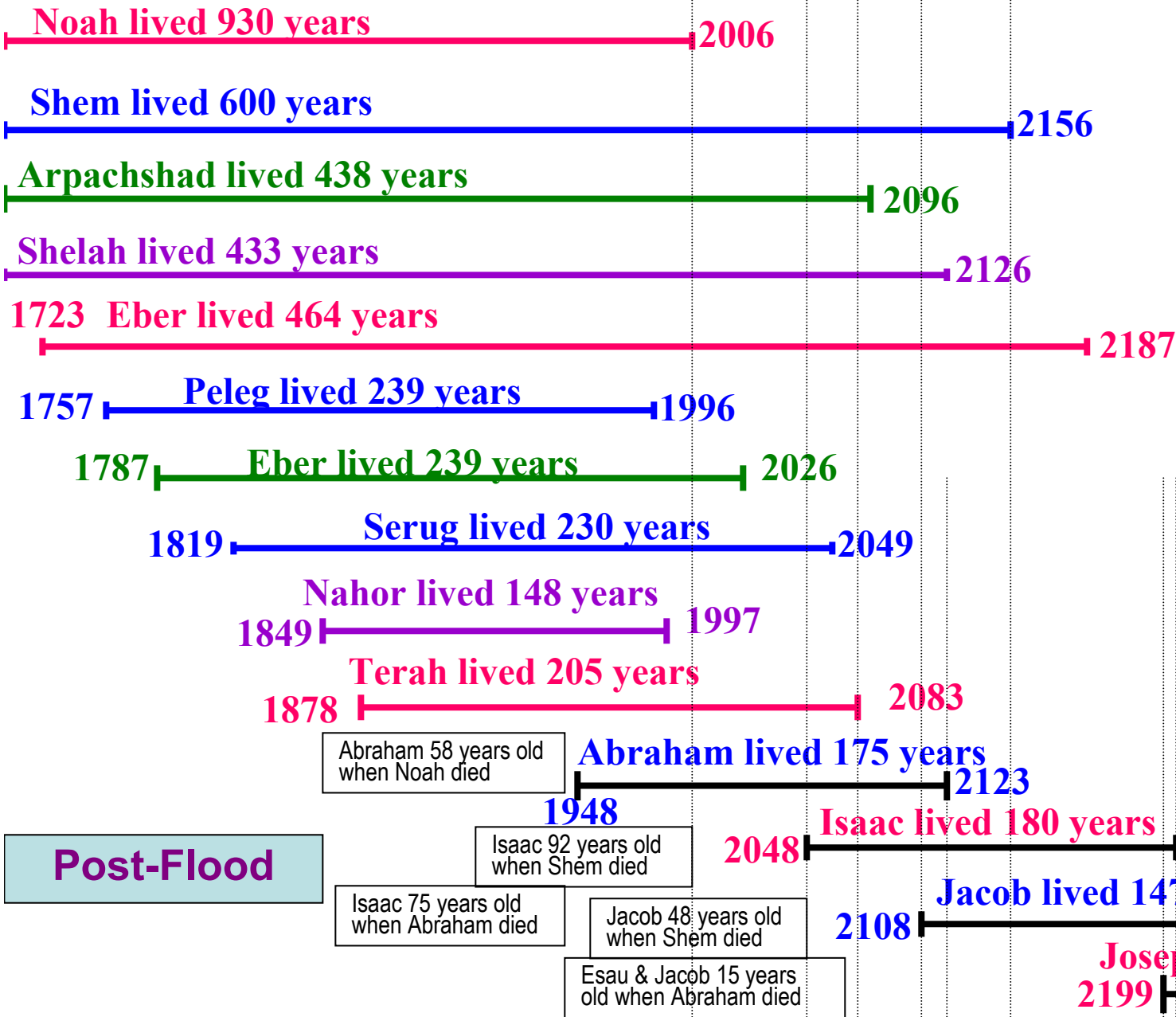
36:1-43 – The Generations of Esau

37:1-50:26 – The Generations of Jacob



Years from Creation

1700	1800	1900	2000	2100	2200	2300
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**BC**

- 2165 - Abram born
- 2090 - Abram reaches Canaan
- 2089 - To Egypt because of famine
- 2066 - Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed
- 2065 - Isaac born
- 2028 - Sarah dies
- 2025 - Isaac marries Rebekah
- 2005 - Esau and Jacob born
- 1990 - Abraham dies
- 1928 - Jacob flees to Haran
- 1921 - Reuben born
- 1914 - Joseph born
- 1897 - Joseph sold into slavery
- 1885 - Isaac dies
- 1875 - Jacob and family enter into Egypt
- 1858 - Jacob dies
- 1804 - Joseph dies

**Post-Flood**

Abraham 58 years old when Noah died

Isaac 92 years old when Shem died

Isaac 75 years old when Abraham died

Jacob 48 years old when Shem died

Esau & Jacob 15 years old when Abraham died

Joseph 29 years old when Isaac died  
Joseph 54 years old when Jacob died

1928BC

1921BC

1914BC

1908BC

Jacob arrives at Haran

Jacob serves 7 years for Leah

Jacob marries Leah

Jacob serves 7 years for Rachel

Jacob serves 6 years to provide for his family

7 days later

Jacob = 91 years old

Jacob = 77 years old

Jacob marries Rachel

Jacob's 11 sons & 1 daughter born during his 20 year sojourn with Laban in Haran

Jacob = 84 years old

Jacob = 97 years old



# Jacob's Wages (30:25-36)

25 Now it came about when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, “Send me away, **that** I may go to my own place and to my own country. 26 Give *me* my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me depart; **for** you yourself know my service which I have rendered you.”

27 **But** Laban said to him, “If now it pleases you, *stay with me; I have divined that the LORD has blessed me on your account.*” 28 And he continued, “Name me your wages, and I will give it.”

29 **But** he said to him, “You yourself know how I have served you and how your cattle have fared with me. 30 **For** you had little before I came, and it has increased to a multitude; and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. **But now**, when shall I provide for my own household also?”

31 **So** he said, “**What shall I give you?**”



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4873.html>

God takes an active interest in our work and reveals himself to us in it, thereby shaping our faith. His involvement therefore makes our place of work a place of worship, even if it feels more like a place of oppression. In fact, the normal Hebrew verb for “work” can also be translated “worship.” In Genesis 30:25-31:16, Jacob has the boss from hell. Laban exploits Jacob and yet God is at work in Jacob’s work, and somehow Jacob flourishes. Spiritually, he comes to life. Can we likewise come to life because of our work? Let’s see.

## Jacob’s start-up

The birth of Joseph, Rachel’s first child, causes Jacob’s heart to turn toward home. He asks Laban to release him so that he can return to his own “place” and, literally, his own “land.” These are two key words in the Jacob narrative. Haran is Laban’s place, not Jacob’s place (Genesis 29:26, 31:35). Jacob never intended to stay there more than a few days, but Laban has kept him there for at least 14 years now. The Lord revealed himself to Jacob in a “certain place,” before his arrival in Haran, to tell him that his place was the land of Canaan, which the Lord promised to him and his descendants (Genesis 28:10-15).

Jacob’s heart is not only turning toward home but turning toward the Lord as well. Returning to the promised land is linked with Jacob’s vow to make the Lord his God (Genesis 28:20-22).



# <http://www.biblestudymanuals.net/gen30.htm>

The phrase "learned by experience" (verse 27) ["learned by divination" (NIV)] is interesting. It represents the Hebrew word *nachash*, and means literally 'learned by enchantments.' Laban had been somewhat perplexed by the fact that Jacob's care of his flocks had resulted in such a great increase in his own wealth. Accordingly, he had in some way either carried out certain divination practices of his own, or else consulted some kind of soothsayer or oracle, seeing the secret. Laban, it becomes clear, though related to Abraham and knowing about Jehovah, had become to some degree a pagan mystic. At any rate, God so overruled his enchantments that, even through them, he had gotten the message that Jacob was under the special care of Jehovah and that it was because of this that God had blessed his service."



# Jacob's Wages (30:25-36)

And Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this *one* thing for me, I will again pasture *and* keep your flock: 32 let me pass through your entire flock today, removing from there every speckled and spotted sheep, and every black one among the lambs, and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and *such* shall be my wages. 33 **So** my honesty will answer for me later, when you come concerning my wages. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, *if found* with me, will be considered stolen."

34 And Laban said, **"Good, let it be according to your word."**

35 **So** he removed on that day the striped and spotted male goats and all the speckled and spotted female goats, every one with white in it, and all the black ones among the sheep, and gave them into the care of his sons. 36 And he put *a distance of* three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks.



# <http://www.biblestudymanuals.net/gen30.htm>

Jacob did not wish Laban to 'give' him anything. He had learned that God would supply what He wanted him to have, and he did not wish to be indebted in any way to a man whom he had come to know as a self-seeking, deceptive, ungodly schemer. He therefore made a proposition to Laban which would give God the opportunity to bless Jacob materially also, as He had Laban through Jacob. This plan would bring blessing to Jacob without taking anything belonging to Laban. Though Laban had doubtless expected Jacob to ask for a certain number of animals to begin his own flocks and herds, and would have been willing (at least outwardly) to give him whatever he would ask, Jacob would not take anything of Laban's which then existed. Instead, he agreed to shepherd and supervise Laban's flocks, exactly as he had been doing, and his pay would consist of those animals yet unborn that would be less desirable to Laban because of their markings. It would thus be entirely up to God as to how many animals would become Jacob's.

Jacob agreed that none of the solid-color animals would be taken into his own flocks. If any should be found by Laban in Jacob's flocks, Laban would have the right to take them out. Only those future animals that would be born speckled or striped or spotted, or abnormatively



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colored in some way, would become Jacob's wages. The dominant color traits in Laban's flocks and herds were evidently white among the sheep, black among the goats, and brown among the cattle. Most of the animals were of these colors, but there were a few that were spotted and speckled among the cattle and goats, and brown among the sheep. It was of such as these that Jacob's pay would be.

However, Jacob further proposed that, not only would none of these living speckled animals be taken by him, but they would not even be used for breeding purposes. He would separate them into a separate flock, and keep them away from the normal-colored animals. Only such spotted and speckled animals as would be born in the future from the normal-colored animals would become his. Since the solid-colored animals were by far the more numerous, and since it was much less likely that they would bear striped and speckled offspring than those animals that were already striped and speckled - or brown among the sheep - this arrangement clearly was highly favorable to Laban and of very doubtful value to Jacob. Indeed, **it was an act of pure faith on his part. He had put himself entirely at God's mercy. It would be up to the Lord to indicate, by a very unlikely set of circumstances, whether Jacob should prosper personally or not.**



# <http://www.biblestudymanuals.net/gen30.htm>

Laban, who was willing to make a far more generous outlay than this to keep Jacob, immediately jumped at the chance to seal such a bargain. He would lose nothing that now belonged to him... [and in all appearances, Laban stood not to be liable for losing much in the future - for Jacob would only possess the 'abnormative' animals which were far fewer in number and far less likely to breed many other 'abnormative' animals]

[Jacob] ...had no breeding stock of his own, and none of the animals from which his pay was to come would be likely to produce spotted and speckled progeny of their own without a spotted and speckled population with which to interbreed...

"Laban decided not to trust Jacob to keep the two sets of flocks separate. He himself... went through the flocks, culling out all the striped and spotted goats, the brown sheep, and other odd-colored animals, and put them into a separate flock, thus assuring himself that Jacob would not leave any of them in the main flock [for additional breeding and the possibility of further 'abnormative' offspring] Then, to make it quite impossible in the future for there to be any mixing, he gave the speckled flock into the hands of his sons, and told them always to keep them at least three days' journey away from the main body of animals which would be tended by Jacob"



# Jacob's Wisdom (v37-43)

37 Then Jacob took fresh rods of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white stripes in them, exposing the white which was in the rods. 38 And he set the rods which he had peeled in front of the flocks in the gutters, *even* in the watering troughs, where the flocks came to drink; and they mated when they came to drink. 39 So the flocks mated by the rods, and the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. 40 And Jacob separated the lambs, and made the flocks face toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban; and he put his own herds apart, and did not put them with Laban's flock.

41 Moreover, it came about whenever the stronger of the flock were mating, that Jacob would place the rods in the sight of the flock in the gutters, so that they might mate by the rods; 42 but when the flock was feeble, he did not put *them* in; so the feebler were Laban's and the stronger Jacob's.

43 So the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys.



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"Jacob knew a great deal about sheep and goats and cattle, however - much more than Laban. He had kept his father's flocks for decades, and now had been in charge of Laban's for over fourteen years. As a very observant and intelligent man he had apparently learned something of what we now call **Mendelian genetics**, simply by long-continued observation of generation after generation of these animals. He knew that, even though a species of animal may have certain 'dominant' traits (such as the white color in this type of sheep)....[Jacob selectively bred the animals with the recessive trait of abnormal coloration with one another in such a manner as to increase their numbers even more than under normative conditions of herd life]

...A certain proportion of the solid-color animals... would be 'homozygous' [i.e., in this case with the same 'abnormal' color genes] and, if mated with other homozygous animals, would bear only solid-color offspring. The 'heterozygous' animals, which did contain in some proportion the genes for off-colored progeny, would be the ones which would have to supply his own future flocks; but by selective breeding he could eventually develop a flock of predominantly spotted and speckled animals....



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There is a great deal, even today, that scientists have not been able to work out concerning the transmission of hereditary factors. In a certain population, there are multitudes of different characteristics which may appear in different individual animals of that species. The variational potential in the DNA molecular structure is tremendous. Exactly what it is that determines the actual characteristics a particular individual [or animal] may have, out of all the potential characteristics that are theoretically available in the gene pool, is not yet known in any significant degree. It may be that Jacob had learned certain things about these animals which modern biologists have not yet even approached.

There are...certain factors which can become prenatal influences, and which can determine to some degree the physical characteristics of the progeny. Though it is surely very unlikely that an external image can be transmitted through the visual apparatus to the brain and thence in some way as a signal to the DNA structure to specify certain characteristics to be triggered in the embryo, it is nevertheless true that certain chemicals can and do have a significant prenatal influence if they can reach the embryo or, prior to conception, the DNA in the germ cells. It is possible that certain chemicals in the wood of these trees - peeled rods



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of which were actually in the water which the flocks came to drink were capable somehow of affecting the animals. If nothing else, water treated thus may have served as an aphrodisiac and fertility promoter among the cattle [and other animals]. At least one such chemical substance found in these trees has been used for such a purpose in both ancient and modern times.

...**The mere sight of the striped rods may have served simply as an aphrodisiac to the cattle when they came to drink.** This in fact seems indicates by verse 38, in which the word translated 'conceive' in the King James Version [in heat, NIV] is actually **the Hebrew *yacham*, meaning to be hot [i.e., to be in heat].** That is, the verse may be read:

'And he set the rods which he peeled before the flocks in the gutters in the watering troughs when the flocks came to drink, that they should become hot [or "'in heat'"] when they came to drink.' In some way not understood (but apparently confirmed by many practical animal raisers since), the sight of white-streaked rods seems to stimulate these animals to sexual activity...



# <http://www.biblestudymanuals.net/gen30.htm>

...The bulk of the animals, which were Laban's, were made by Jacob to face toward the separate flock of speckled and spotted lambs, but were kept separate from them. The reason for having them thus oriented is not clear; perhaps it was to make a subconscious impression on them that stripes and speckles were a mark of distinction in the flock, so as to make preparations for and augment the aphrodisiac influences of the striped rods. It is possible that, as a symbolic gesture, he had them face toward the three-days-distant flock of Laban's ring-streaked cattle. Though they could not see them, this might have symbolized Jacob's confidence that Laban's pure-color flock would eventually produce a new ring-streaked flock for himself.

A further measure was taken by Jacob to ensure that the flocks so produced would be composed of strong animals. He divided the flocks into two shifts, composed of stronger and weaker animals, respectively. He used the rods in the troughs when the stronger animals drank, but not when the weaker ones came there. Thus **the stronger animals were stimulated to mate, and the others were not...** This measure, likewise, to the extent it would be effective, constituted a sound practice of animal husbandry, and should have been of as great benefit to Laban.



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**as to Jacob.** It would ensure that, statistically at least, most of the newborn lambs and kids, whether solid color or spotted, would be sturdy and healthy. However, there continued to be produced an abnormally large proportion of spotted and speckled young. This meant that a greater and greater percentage of the animals in Jacob's flock were strong animals, and an increasing percentage in Laban's were weaker animals.

It was not until later that Jacob came to understand the providential intervention that caused the unusual percentage of streaked and spotted animals to be born...

...In the meantime, within the space of only a few years - perhaps four or five - Jacob's flock had grown so large, and he had prospered from it so greatly, that he had to employ many servants, both male and female, and had purchased many camels and asses. He had quickly become a very prosperous rancher. He had done so, not by any dishonest manipulation of his own, [or by some mystical methodology] but by means of sound practices of animal breeding which, by all normal standards, should have been of even greater benefit to Laban than to himself. The God of his fathers, however, had intervened in a marvelous and... [supernatural] way.



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4873.html>

Jacob was Laban's doormat, but now he has turned the tables on him. And, like Abraham and Isaac before him, Jacob became "exceedingly prosperous" under the nose of a pagan leader (Genesis 12:16, 26:12-14). **The verb in the phrase "became exceedingly prosperous" is the same one that the Lord used when he promised that Jacob's descendants would "spread out," or break through, to all points of the compass (Genesis 28:14).**

**Jacob foreshadows his descendants, the people of Israel, who served Egypt but sought release to worship the Lord (Exodus 7:16, 8:1). Laban foreshadows Pharaoh, who refused to let the Israelites go. In Egypt, the Israelites "multiplied and became exceedingly mighty" in the land of Egypt (Exodus 1:7, 20).**

Jacob came to Haran with nothing. Although it has taken many years, he is now a wealthy man.



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## Realistic perspective

The story of Jacob gives us a realistic perspective on the workplace. Today we want our jobs to be exhilarating, and we are surprised when we encounter drudgery, cantankerous supervisors and backbiting co-workers. Since the fall, the workplace has been a place of toil and sweat (Genesis 3:17-19). As men and women of the covenant, our toil and sweat should benefit our employer. The people we work for should be able to say, in so many words, “The Lord has blessed me on your account.” When we do our jobs well, we contribute to making the Lord visible to our employers. We should even be able to say, along with Jacob, “You yourself know the service that I have rendered you.” We should be men and women of integrity who have nothing to hide and whose work is open to investigation.

We can make the case, as Jacob did, that we’re underpaid, if that’s the appearance of things, but by the appearance of things, Jacob never did get a better wage from Laban. Whatever our employer pays us, it’s nothing in comparison to the value God assigns our work if we offer it up to him. Therefore, we should look at the workplace the way Jacob did: as an opportunity to develop skills. This aspect of the workplace is much underplayed today. Other aspects—financial rewards,



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career advancement and personal satisfaction—are overplayed. What you learn now will pay off in the future, though you don't know how. And you never know how what you learn in the workplace will be used by God as you serve him in other ways. Jacob, like Moses and David after him, learned to shepherd a flock that he might shepherd God's flock.

Jacob didn't receive much in wages from Laban, but he did receive an opportunity. If we take the opportunity to learn skills in the workplace, we'll be better prepared when other opportunities come our way. It also behooves us to look for opportunities—to start something or take something and seek to make it grow. Laban's refusal to trust Jacob actually gave Jacob an opening for creativity. Oppressive work conditions are no excuse for stifling creativity. In fact, oppressive work conditions can lead us to take risks that never would have occurred to us otherwise.

Jacob becomes prosperous, but only after years of hard work. For most of those years, Jacob had little to show for it. How different Jacob's life is from the way we want ours to be. The atmosphere here has changed since the stock option craze of the late '90s, but the air is still filled with get-rich-quick schemes. Too much wealth and too much success too soon are not usually good for the soul. Wealth and success can go to our heads and take us away from dependence on God.



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Last night I watched a documentary about a man who had failed at everything he had tried by the age of 33, though he was a hard worker. Then, when the United States entered World War I, he enlisted. He was partially blind in one eye, so he memorized the chart to pass the eye exam. He became a captain and led his men into battle in Europe. He never lost a man! They said that luck seemed to follow him around. He was successful for the first time in his life. After the war, he opened a men's clothing store, but that failed, and he went bankrupt. He was 38 years old. One of his war buddies thought he might make a good political candidate, so he ran for county commissioner and won, but only by 279 votes. The man's name? Harry S. Truman, 33rd president of the United States. In the face of failure, he continued to work hard. In ways that he couldn't have imagined, the leadership skills he learned along the way paid off for an entire nation at a crucial point in its history.

The story of Jacob, as it unfolds, values greater riches: the wealth of a relationship with God that outweighs and outlasts silver and gold. And if the Lord does bless us with wealth, it still belongs to him, not us, and we must think of it in that way.



# Genesis 31:1-5 – Jacob's Return to Canaan

## The Command to Return (31:1-13)

1 Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, “**Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what belonged to our father he has made all this wealth.**” 2 And Jacob saw the attitude of Laban, and behold, it was not *friendly* toward him as formerly.

3 Then the LORD said to Jacob, “**Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.**”

4 So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to his flock in the field, 5 and said to them, “**I see your father's attitude, that it is not *friendly* toward me as formerly, but the God of my father has been with me.** 6 And you know that I have served your father with all my strength. 7 **Yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times; however, God did not allow him to hurt me.**



# Genesis 31:1-5 – Jacob's Return to Canaan

8 If he spoke thus, 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flock brought forth speckled; and if he spoke thus, 'The striped shall be your wages,' then all the flock brought forth striped. 9 Thus God has taken away your father's livestock and given *them* to me. 10 And it came about at the time when the flock were mating that I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the male goats which were mating were striped, speckled, and mottled. 11 Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am.' 12 And he said, 'Lift up, now, your eyes and see *that* all the male goats which are mating are striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. 13 I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me; now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth.'"



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Jacob says he has served Laban with all his strength—and he has a lot of strength, as evidenced by his moving the stone from the mouth of the well (Genesis 29:10). Although Laban cheated Jacob and changed his wages, God has seen that Laban has not been able to hurt him. In fact, Laban's schemes have backfired. His efforts to limit Jacob's wages actually resulted in an increase. **Jacob sees the hand of God in this.** Laban's sons' interpretation was that “Jacob has taken away all that was our father's.” **But Jacob's interpretation, offered to his wives, is that “God has taken away your father's livestock and given them to me.”**

God has not only prevented Laban from harming Jacob, he has used Laban's efforts to harm Jacob as a means of blessing him. Jacob attributes his amazing success not to his breeding program but to God. **Again, Jacob and Laban foreshadow Israel and Egypt. The more Pharaoh afflicted the Israelites, the more they multiplied (Exodus 1 and 2).**

At some point the Lord gave Jacob a dream in which abnormally colored goats were mating. Regardless of whether it occurred before or after Jacob's request for the abnormally colored animals, the narrator's point is that the Lord is responsible for Jacob's prosperity.



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The Lord identified himself as the “God of Bethel,” reminding Jacob that at Bethel he erected a memorial pillar and made a vow to make the Lord his God if the Lord fulfilled his promises. When he was on his way to Haran, Jacob had taken a stone and used it as a pillow and spent the night alone in Bethel, which means “House of God.” The Lord revealed himself to Jacob in that place, and Jacob took the stone and turned it into a pillar. The difficult place of transition became for him a place of worship.

The Lord has appeared to Jacob once again in a difficult place, this time in the land of Haran, where Laban had enslaved him. The difficult place of servitude also becomes a place of worship, for the God of “The House of God” is there. The Lord reminded Jacob of his vow to make the Lord his God upon his return to the promised land. So he commanded Jacob to leave “this land,” which is not his home, and return to the “land of your birth,” which is where he and his people belong.

Jacob has seen the Lord in his place of work, and it has shaped his faith. It has helped him emerge as a man of faith, who obeys the Lord and shares the Lord with his wives.



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## God at work

What do we do about jealous co-workers who ascribe our success to underhanded tactics and thereby sully our reputation? At the highest level, we are to acknowledge the sovereignty of God. He is sovereign over both employers and co-workers, over both Laban and Laban's sons. The jealousy of co-workers may even move you in the direction of the Lord's leading, just as it moved Jacob.

And what is it that the Lord promises us in the workplace? He promises us the same thing he promises for every aspect of our lives: He promises to be with us. For some of us, that may mean riches. For others of us, that may mean poverty. For all of us, that means the Lord is committed to his relationship with us and to accomplishing his carefully crafted purposes for each of us. Therefore, look for the hand of the Lord in your workplace—how he works things together for good in ways beyond your anticipation. If the Lord is with us in the workplace, it doesn't matter who is against us there. "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Romans 8:31).

If we see the Lord's faithfulness to us in the workplace, and how he values our initiative there, we should be encouraged to take initiative elsewhere and to speak of the Lord's faithfulness, in the manner of Jacob. Leadership in the workplace may come easier to us than spiritual leadership at home, for example. But if we involve the Lord in our work, and see his power in the sphere of greater comfort, we can be encouraged to take him home with us. All the while, the workplace stretches us, and we become something we weren't before, just as Jacob became a "man of the field."

If ultimately we are successful in the world's eyes, to what will we attribute that success? Credit goes to the Lord...



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4873.html>

It's easy to see what the Labans of this world are doing to us. It's not as easy for us to "lift up our eyes" and understand that the Lord sees everything that the Labans are doing. We see this world, but the scriptures, as the Holy Spirit illuminates them, give us eyes to see a different world—a heavenly world that has invaded this world. Lift up your eyes and see—see that God sees, that God cares, that God is involved. God has seen everything that has happened in your workplace. And he will right all wrongs. Much of our workplace angst is rooted in our propensity to look for meaning, riches or advancement without looking to the Lord.

Watch for how you reap in the workplace what you have sowed. When something is done to us that causes us harm, have we in the past treated others in a similar way? Laban does to Jacob in the workplace what Jacob did to his wives at home. **The workplace is often a crucible in which our faith issues with God become visible. It's a place of spiritual discipline. Even if we've done nothing "wrong" per se, we may endure harsh working conditions for many years as God shapes us. With this perspective, it is possible to work hard and even effectively in an oppressive environment.**

Most importantly, God reveals himself to us in the workplace. Often, the workplace is a hard place. God specializes in revealing himself to men and women in the difficult places of their lives. He revealed himself to Jacob in Bethel when he was on the run, and in Haran, where he toiled for years. He thereby transforms those places into places of worship. The "God of the House of God" is in your workplace, which makes it, of all things, a temple.



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4873.html>

How do we go about worshiping God in the workplace? No one saw God more clearly in the workplace or worshiped him better there than **Brother Lawrence**, the 16th century monk who served his order in France as a cook for more than 30 years. He never sought a “higher” position.

He had a natural aversion to the kitchen, but one friend noted that Brother Lawrence accustomed himself to do everything there for the love of God and to pray on all occasions for God’s grace to do his work well. When he went to work, Brother Lawrence would pray, “O my God, since Thou art with me, and I must now, in obedience to Thy commands, apply my mind to these outward things, I beseech Thee to grant me the grace to continue in Thy presence; and to this end do Thou prosper me with Thy assistance, receive all my works, and possess all of my affections.”

His friend said, “As he proceeded in his work, he continued his familiar conversation with his Maker, imploring His grace, and offering to Him all his actions.” Such conversation was not immediately easy for him, however. At first he did so with diligence, but then he found that the love of God inwardly excited him so that he conversed with God without difficulty.

“The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer,” he said, “and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament.” His friend said Brother Lawrence was “pleased when he could take up a straw from the ground for the love of God, seeking Him only, and nothing else, not even His gifts.”(1)



# Genesis 31:1-5 – Jacob's Return to Canaan

## Jacob Steals Away (31:14-21)

14 And Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, “Do we still have any portion or inheritance in our father's house? 15 Are we not reckoned by him as foreigners? **For** he has sold us, and has also entirely consumed our purchase price. 16 Surely all the wealth which God has taken away from our father belongs to us and our children; now then, do whatever God has said to you.”



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4873.html>

## Rachel and Leah agree

Rachel and Leah respond to Jacob with one voice. Earlier, they were at odds with each other. Evidently, once they began talking to each other, they were able to reconcile their differences (Genesis 30:14-15). Also, Laban's treatment of his daughters now works against him. They recognize that they have no "portion or inheritance" in their "father's house." Whatever inheritance they have is with Jacob, with the God of his "father," with the God of the "House" of God (Genesis 31:5).

Laban has treated Rachel and Leah not as daughters but as foreigners, with no rights. He sold them to Jacob, who paid for them with 14 years' worth of labor. It was customary to transfer part of the purchase price to the brides themselves. The women, then, should have benefited from Jacob's work for Laban. However, Jacob was not even able to provide for his family (Genesis 30:30). Evidently, the women see Laban's oppression of Jacob as total consumption of the purchase price. Both Rachel and Leah agree with Jacob's interpretation of the transfer of wealth. They do not believe that "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's," as their brothers believed (Genesis 31:1), but that "God has taken away from our father what belongs to us and our children." The women therefore tell Jacob to "do whatever God has said to you." **Jacob has told his wives about God's involvement in his life, and they believe him. Their future is not in Haran but in Canaan, not with Laban but with Jacob. Their future is with the family of God.**



# Genesis 31:1-5 – Jacob's Return to Canaan

## Jacob Steals Away (31:14-21)

17 Then Jacob arose and put his children and his wives upon camels; 18 and he drove away all his livestock and all his property which he had gathered, his acquired livestock which he had gathered in Paddan-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac. 19 When Laban had gone to shear his flock, then Rachel stole the household idols that were her father's. 20 And Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean, by not telling him that he was fleeing. 21 **So** he fled with all that he had; and he arose and crossed the *Euphrates* River, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead.



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4874.html>

Before leaving, Rachel, Jacob's wife, steals her father's household idols. Her father has stolen her husband from her and her share of the purchase price, so she steals his idols from him. Although she has told Jacob to do what God has told him, she is not ready to cast her lot completely with the God of Jacob's father, especially with a difficult journey in front of her. Rachel's stealing of the idols from her father echoes Jacob's stealing of the patriarchal blessing from his father, though, of course, the idols will profit Rachel nothing.

Just as Jacob fled from Canaan to Haran, he now flees from Haran to Canaan (Genesis 27:43). In each case, he fled from someone who meant him harm, first Esau and then Laban. Jacob, it seems, isn't safe wherever he goes.

When he crosses the Euphrates River, he has 300 miles of desert ahead of him. He sets his "face" toward the familiar hills of Gilead, which border the Promised Land. Haran has forced him to face into himself. Now he sets his face, and he turns his heart, toward home. Before he gets there, he will have to cross another river, the Jabbok, where he will see the "face" of God before seeing the "face" of his brother (Genesis 32:22, 30; 33:10). Hope and fear will be his companions for the long journey home.



<http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4874.html>

## Fear in the workplace

Like Jacob, many of us feel that we're not safe wherever we go, especially in the workplace. On the one hand, we're afraid of losing a job. On the other hand, we're afraid of getting stuck in a job. A career is a magnet for dreams. Anyplace where dreams are gathered, there will you find your heart—what you really believe. Your experience in the workplace, then, is telling you something about yourself. Perhaps it is showing you that you've been running from something—from your past, from a certain destiny, maybe from God himself. But now, like Jacob, you're ready to face up to your past, to face into God and to accept the destiny of his design, even if it feels that you have to traverse 300 miles of desert to do so. Such thoughts fill you with both hope and fear.

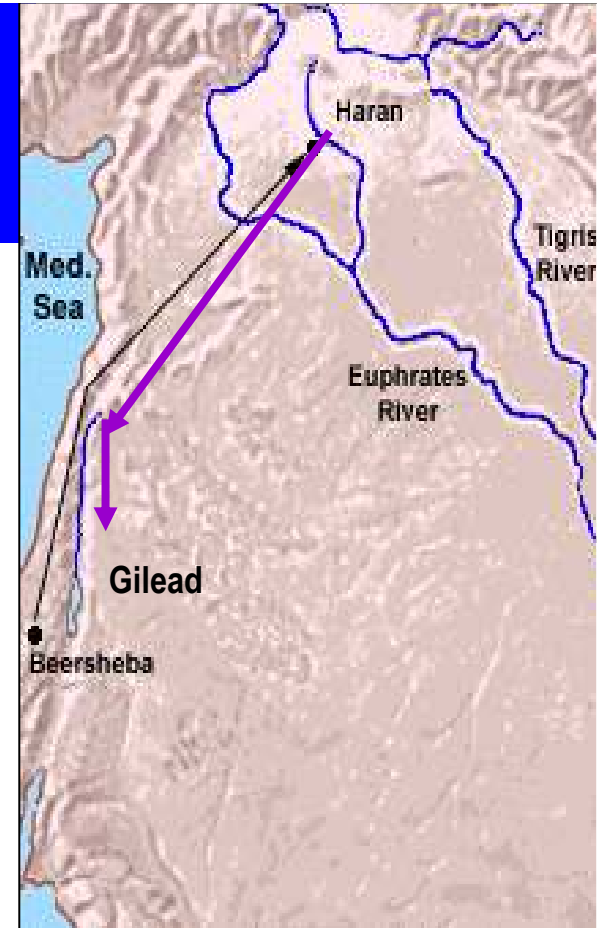


# Laban Pursues Jacob (31:22-24)

## Laban Pursues Jacob (31:22-24)

22 When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled, 23 then he took his kinsmen with him, and pursued him a *distance of seven days' journey*; and he overtook him in the hill country of Gilead. 24 And God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream of the night, and said to him, “**Be careful that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad.**”

Laban is identified as “the Aramean” for the first time since Jacob’s arrival in Haran. Although at first he called Jacob “my bone and flesh,” Laban’s place is not with the family of God (Genesis 29:14).



A full caravan travels about 30 miles a day, while Laban probably traveled about 43 miles a day in order to catch up with Jacob



# Laban's Complaint against Jacob (31:25-30)

**25** And Laban caught up with Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsmen camped in the hill country of Gilead.

**26** Then Laban said to Jacob, “**What have you done by deceiving me and carrying away my daughters like captives of the sword? 27 Why did you flee secretly and deceive me, and did not tell me, so that I might have sent you away with joy and with songs, with timbrel and with lyre; 28 and did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters? Now you have done foolishly. 29 It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, ‘Be careful not to speak either good or bad to Jacob.’ 30 And now you have indeed gone away because you longed greatly for your father's house; *but* why did you steal my gods?”**



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4874.html>

Every sentence in Laban's complaint up to verse 29 reveals his hypocrisy. Laban says to Jacob, "What have you done ... ?" echoing Jacob's words to Laban when Laban substituted Leah for Rachel (Genesis 29:25). Laban accuses Jacob of carrying away his daughters like "captives of the sword," but Laban had held his daughters and Jacob captive and at this time threatens force (Genesis 31:14-16). Laban accuses Jacob of deceiving him, but Laban made a habit of deceiving Jacob. Laban intimates that he would have sent Jacob away with a party, but the last party Laban threw for Jacob resulted in Jacob's captivity (Genesis 29:22). Laban complains that Jacob did not allow him to kiss his family, but such a gesture on Laban's part would have been a hollow one, for he viewed his daughters as commodities.

Laban would very much enjoy doing to Jacob everything that Jacob has done to him. Laban accuses Jacob of acting foolishly, but Laban is the one who is beginning to look foolish.

Finally, Laban brings his dream out in the open. He claims he has the power to harm Jacob, but he yields to the Lord, whose greater power he has come to acknowledge. After recognizing the Lord, Laban appears somewhat sympathetic, acknowledging that Jacob longed to return to his father's house. He even arrives at something that has the appearance of a legitimate complaint—the theft of his idols.

The verb translated "steal" in verse 30 opens and closes Laban's complaint. Literally, Laban in verse 26 said to Jacob that "you stole my heart" by carrying off the women.



# Laban Deceived by Rachel (31:31-35)

31 Then Jacob answered and said to Laban, "**Because** I was afraid, **for** I said, '**Lest** you would take your daughters from me by force.' 32 The one with whom you find your gods shall not live; in the presence of our kinsmen point out what is yours among my belongings and take *it* for yourself." **For** Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them.

33 **So** Laban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the tent of the two maids, **but** he did not find *them*. Then he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's tent. 34 Now Rachel had taken the household idols and put them in the camel's saddle, and she sat on them. And Laban felt through all the tent, but did not find *them*. 35 And she said to her father, "Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, **for** the manner of women is upon me." **So** he searched, **but** did not find the household idols.



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4874.html>

Jacob responds to the accusations that he stole Laban's daughters and stole the idols. First, Jacob says he left with his wives without telling Laban for fear that Laban would take his daughters "by force." Second, Jacob knows he didn't take the idols and invites Laban to go through his belongings. In fact, Jacob is so certain that Laban won't find the idols that he invokes the death penalty for anyone found in possession of the idols.

The narrator informs us that Jacob was unaware that Rachel had stolen the idols. Jacob, the master of deceit, is deceived by his wife. He had worked seven years for Rachel. He was lured into 20 years of servitude by his love for her. Now Jacob, because of his rashness, is in danger of losing her, though he does not know it.

As readers, we know more than either Laban or Jacob and are thus drawn into the story, anxious about the outcome. The tension builds as Laban rifles through Jacob's tent, Leah's tent and the tents of the two maids. Finally, he enters Rachel's tent. Only now are we informed where Rachel had been keeping the idols. She had put them in the saddle of her camel and was sitting on them.



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4874.html>

The search through Rachel's tent is reported as being more painstaking. Laban "felt" through everything. Years earlier, Isaac "felt" Jacob, but Jacob succeeded in deceiving his father (Genesis 27:22). Now Rachel is deceiving her father, who is feeling for the truth.

Rachel remains seated on the camel, concealing the idols and claiming that she can't get down because she's having her period. The story makes a laughingstock of Laban's "gods." First, they are stolen. Second, they are impotent to make themselves known. Third, in being relegated to the status of a sanitary napkin, they are desecrated.

The God that Jacob is coming to know can't be stolen, for there is no image of him to steal (Exodus 20:4). He makes himself known, both in judgment and in salvation (Exodus 6:7). People "find" him when they "search" for him with all their hearts (Jeremiah 29:13). No matter how men and women respond to him, he remains holy.

Three times the narrator tells us that Laban "did not find" the idols. Laban comes off as utterly foolish, his gods as utterly impotent.



# Jacob's Complaint Against Laban (31:36-42)

•36 Then Jacob became angry and contended with Laban; and Jacob answered and said to Laban, “What is my transgression? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me? 37 Though you have felt through all my goods, what have you found of all your household goods? Set *it* here before my kinsmen and your kinsmen, **that** they may decide between us two. 38 These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten the rams of your flocks. 39 That which was torn *of beasts* I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it myself. You required it of my hand *whether* stolen by day or stolen by night. 40 *Thus* I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. 41 These twenty years I have been in your house; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you changed my wages ten times. 42 **If** the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had not been for me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the toil of my hands, **so** He rendered judgment last night.”



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4874.html>

Jacob, feeling vindicated by Laban's dream and by his failure to find the idols, vigorously defends himself. Jacob "became angry." Having little choice as Laban's "slave," Jacob has kept it all inside for 20 years. Now, sensing for the first time that he has the advantage, Jacob unloads.

First, Jacob says, Laban's accusation that he stole the idols has been proved false. Second, Jacob recounts his meticulous and above-and-beyond service in Laban's behalf. Custom dictated that a shepherd was not responsible for losses among his flock attributable to attacks from wild beasts, but Jacob nevertheless incurred such losses himself (Exodus 22:10-13). Jacob was also accountable for theft during the night, which was considered a less serious matter. Third, Jacob bore tremendous physical burdens in caring for Laban's flock. Fourth, Laban changed Jacob's wages. Jacob says, in so many words, "You're the one who has stolen from me."

Jacob's response culminates neither with a defense nor an accusation but with a theological observation that summarizes his 20 years in Haran. With verse 42, the Jacob-Laban story reaches its climax.

Jacob recognizes the Lord's faithfulness to the promise of Bethel to be with him (Genesis 28:15). **The "fear of Isaac," a unique title for the Lord, evokes the worship that he deserves.** It also relates to Jacob's encounter with the Lord at Bethel, where Jacob "was afraid" and said, "How awesome is this place" (Genesis 28:17). (The word translated "awesome" stems from the verb translated "was afraid.") In the current setting, Laban's "fear" of the Lord is preventing him harming Jacob.



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4874.html>

Laban indicated that if Jacob had been forthright about his departure, he would have sent him away with “joy and with songs, with timbrel and with lyre.” Apart from the Lord’s intervention, Jacob says, Laban would have sent him away “empty-handed.” The Mosaic Law demanded that Hebrew slaves be set free after six years and that they not be sent away “empty-handed” (Deuteronomy 15:12-13). Because God has been for him, Jacob did not leave Haran empty-handed.

God, in helping Jacob become prosperous in Haran, had told him in a dream that he had “seen all that Laban has been doing to you” (Genesis 31:12). Jacob now acknowledges that God has “seen my affliction and the toil of my hands” and that he has responded not only by helping him become prosperous but by rendering “judgment last night” in Laban’s dream.

In surveying 20 years of affliction in Haran, Jacob says that God has seen him and acted on his behalf. He therefore understands affliction in a different way. He is able to say, “God has been for me.” For Jacob, as he finally extricates himself from Laban, that seems to be enough.



# Jacob's Covenant with Laban

## (31:43-55)

43 Then Laban answered and said to Jacob, “The daughters are my daughters, and the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. **But** what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne? 44 So now come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me.” 45 Then Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. 46 And Jacob said to his kinsmen, “**Gather stones.**” **So** they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. 47 Now Laban called it = witness heap Jegar-sahadutha, **but** Jacob called it = witness heap Galeed. 48 And Laban said, “This heap is a witness between you and me this day.” = watchtower **Therefore** it was named Galeed; 49 and Mizpah,



# Jacob's Covenant with Laban

## (31:43-55)

**for** he said, “May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from the other. **50 If** you mistreat my daughters, or **if** you take wives besides my daughters, *although* no man is with us, see, God is witness between you and me.” **51 And** Laban said to Jacob, “Behold this heap and behold the pillar which I have set between you and me. **52 This** heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, **that** I will not pass by this heap to you for harm, and you will not pass by this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. **53 The** God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us.”

**So** Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. **54 Then** Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his kinsmen to the meal; and they ate the meal and spent the night on the mountain. **55 And** early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and his daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place.



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4874.html>

Laban and Jacob have the same name for the place, Jegar-sahadutha and Galeed, which mean “heap of witness” in Aramaic and Hebrew, respectively. Another name, “Mizpah,” is attached to the place. It is a play on the word “watch,” which features prominently in Laban’s appeal that the Lord will monitor the agreement: “May the Lord watch between you and me when we are absent from one another.” Of course, the Lord has been watching all along, and he has ruled in favor of Jacob.

Laban warns Jacob against mistreating his daughters or taking additional wives, which would have diluted their and their children’s inheritance. Once again, Laban comes off as a hypocrite, for he mistreated his daughters and forced Jacob to take two wives (Genesis 31:14-16, 29:27).

Laban, a polytheist, most likely is invoking a multitude of gods. The word used for “god” (*elohim*) can be singular or plural. In this case, it’s most likely plural. Laban mentions the gods of Abraham and the gods of Nahor, which are further identified as gods of their fathers (before Abraham entered into covenant with the Lord, he and his father, Terah, most likely worshiped pagan gods). Jacob, on the other hand, swears by only one God, the God of Abraham, who is once again identified as the fear of Isaac.

The two men consecrate the covenant with a traditional sacrificial meal... Laban kisses and blesses his daughters and grandchildren, as tradition called for, but nothing in the narrative would lead us to believe these gestures carry any meaning for him. Just as Jacob “arose” to leave Laban, Laban arises to leave Jacob (Genesis 31:17). When Rachel bore Joseph, Jacob wanted to return to his own “place,” his own country. Laban, who detained Jacob for another six years, now returns to “his place.” Jacob’s 20 years of exile have come to an end.



<http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4874.html>

### Remembering God's faithfulness

Your workplace, like Jacob's Haran, deserves a pillar. At first, like Jacob, you didn't think so. God was there, but you didn't see him. At first, you thought you could push all the stones out of the way and get what you wanted. At some point, you came up against a Laban-sized stone that wouldn't budge. When you needed God to be there, you saw that he was there. Your workplace deserves at least a mental memorial to God's presence.

Employers may swear by a multitude of gods, with the almighty dollar leading the pantheon. From their perspective, anything that serves those gods is accepted without question. We may enter the workplace, like Jacob, with a somewhat ambiguous relationship with the Lord, but as he reveals himself to us and acts on our behalf, we know that for us there is but one God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We swear allegiance to him and him alone.

As we do so, we have something to offer the world, a new perspective and a new way of working that places Jesus Christ at the center of what we do.



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4874.html>

## God is for us

This story tells us that God is with us and for us in the workplace. It also reminds us of Paul's words in Romans 8:31-39: "If God is for us, who is against us?" It does not matter whether Laban is against us, for nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

You are a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, and when you go to work, even if you're working for Laban, you're working for Jesus. Therefore, God is watching over you to vindicate you in the end. You will not leave this place empty-handed; you'll leave with a faith more precious than gold, which, though tested by the workplace, will be honored by God (1 Peter 1:7). And you will inherit the entire new creation, where, in the imagery of Revelation 21, the streets are paved with the gold that this world values.

Today it may seem that you're working for Laban, even though in reality you're working for Jesus. One day, there will be no confusion. Laban will return to his place, and you will arise to serve your Lord in the new and better place.



# BREAK TIME



1928BC

1921BC

1914BC

1908BC

Jacob arrives at Haran

Jacob serves 7 years for Leah

Jacob marries Leah

Jacob serves 7 years for Rachel

Jacob serves 6 years to provide for his family

7 days later

Jacob = 91 years old

Jacob = 77 years old

Jacob marries Rachel

Jacob's 11 sons & 1 daughter born during his 20 year sojourn with Laban in Haran

Jacob = 84 years old

Jacob = 97 years old



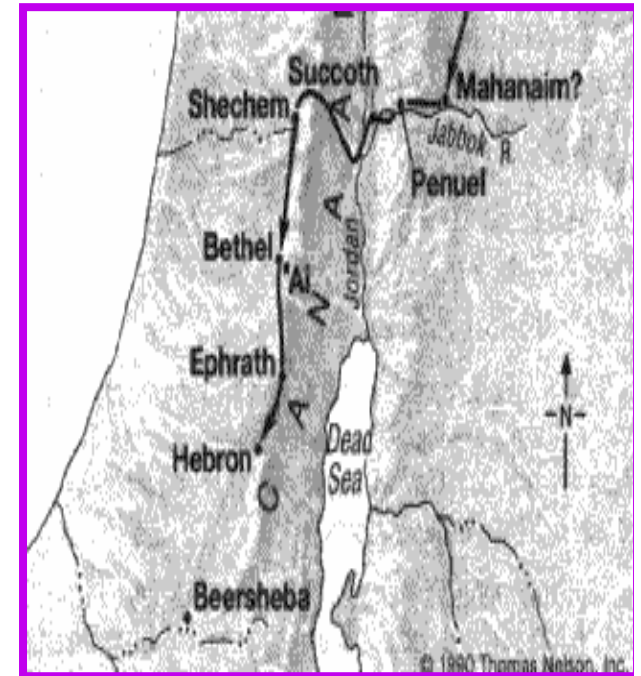
# Genesis 32:1-32 Jacob's Problems on Re-entry into the Promised Land

## v1-2 The Camp of God

1 Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him. 2 And Jacob said when he saw them, "This is God's camp." So he named that place Mahanaim.



Bedouin Tents pitched near the Jabbok River



<http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4875.html>

### Angels meet Jacob

Earlier in his life, Jacob encountered some angels as he was leaving the Promised Land on his way to Haran (Genesis 28:10-22). Now, as he approaches the Promised Land, he meets angels once again...

The angels “met” Jacob, just as Esau was coming to “meet” him (Genesis 32:6, 33:4). In Genesis 28, Jacob was running from Esau but running into Laban. In Genesis 32, he’s running from Laban but running into Esau. The angels prepare Jacob for his meeting with Esau and his return to the Promised Land, just as they prepared him for his meeting with Laban and his sojourn in Haran.

When Adam and Eve were driven from the garden in Eden, the Lord stationed cherubim, angelic beings, at the east entrance to the garden, to prevent humanity from returning to it. Now, as Jacob returns from the east to the Promised Land, which is portrayed in the Scriptures as something akin to the new garden in Eden, angels meet him, not to guard the way but to prepare the way.

Jacob is thus pictured, as are others in the Scriptures, as the new Adam, and as carrying the promised seed of Eve (Genesis 3:15). He brings with him the family that would give birth to the 12 tribes, which would give birth to the Messiah and the 12 disciples and the church of Jesus Christ. In other words, he brings with him the future of humanity. **Angels often appear at such crucial moments in the history of biblical revelation.**

And here, the reappearance of the angels reminds Jacob of the Lord’s promise to bring him back to the land and of his vow to make the Lord his God if the Lord fulfilled his promise....The appearance of the angels causes Jacob to conclude that it’s not just his



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4875.html>

camp. It's also God's camp. In Genesis 28, he named the place where angels appeared to him Bethel, which means "House of God." He names this place Mahanaim, which means "Two Camps."

Now, Bethel was in the Promised Land, Jacob's home, which would be the place of God's dwelling, where the Israelites would build the temple, the house of God. Jacob's stay outside the Promised Land is just temporary; therefore, he sees the place not as God's house but as God's camp. This place is similar to any number of locations in the wilderness, where the Israelites pitched the tabernacle of God, which was the forerunner of the permanent temple in the Promised Land.

As mentioned before, Jacob calls it "Two Camps," perhaps because he sees that both he and God are camped there, along with members of each camp, Jacob's party and the God's angels. **The name may also foreshadow the two camps into which Jacob would divide his party, and the two camps that would meet each other—his and Esau's (Genesis 32:6-7).**

Jacob's response shows that this encounter causes him to remember another time and another place—another border crossing. He was running from his past then, and heading into an uncertain future. God met him and made promises. **The years since have been hard, but the Lord has kept his promises. Once again, Jacob is heading into an uncertain future, but he has seen the faithfulness of the Lord. This time, he's not running from his past; he's facing into it.**

**The angels, appearing upon Jacob's departure from and return to the Promised Land, mark the time, and the faithfulness of God. The Lord wants Jacob to know, once again, "I am with you."** The poetry of the Lord, sending angels to Jacob in a similar time and place, strengthens him for the journey ahead.



# Genesis 32:1-32 Jacob's Problems on Re-entry into the Promised Land

## v3-5 Jacob Contacts Esau

3 Then Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. 4 He also commanded them saying, “Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: ‘Thus says your servant Jacob, “I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now; 5 and I have oxen and donkeys *and* flocks and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.’””

## v6 Esau Comes with 400 men

6 And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.”



# Genesis 32:1-32 Jacob's Problems on Re-entry into the Promised Land

## v7-21 Jacob's Fearful Response

### v7-8 Jacob's Plan

7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into **two companies**; 8 **for** he said, "**If** Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape."

Genesis 27:41 - So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob."



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4875.html>

The word translated “messengers” in verse 3 is translated “angels” in verse 1. Angels function as God’s messengers. The Lord sent his angels/messengers to Jacob, and now Jacob sends his messengers to Esau. The Lord, after sending his messengers, will meet with Jacob (Genesis 32:24-30). Likewise, Jacob, after sending his messengers, will meet with Esau...

Jacob refers to Esau as his “lord” and identifies himself as Esau’s “servant.” From birth, the Lord destined Esau to “serve” Jacob (Genesis 25:23). This was confirmed through the blessings given by Isaac (Genesis 27:29, 40). Jacob, having stolen the blessing and clung to it, now appears ready to release it. **Abraham made a similar decision in his conflict with his relative, Lot** (Genesis 13:1-12).

In his first move toward Esau, Jacob doesn’t offer any of his possessions, but he lets his brother know about them. Evidently, he wants to discover Esau’s strength and intentions before offering a gift outright.

**His purpose in sending his messengers to Esau is to find favor in the sight of Esau. Never before has Jacob sought favor in Esau’s eyes. He only sought to take what belonged to Esau, first his birthright and**



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4875.html>

then his blessing. Perhaps because his options are limited, but perhaps also because he is beginning to trust the Lord, Jacob seeks Esau's favor, not his possessions. After all, Jacob is returning to the land in obedience to the Lord... Jacob sends the messengers "before him." The words "before him" or "before me" appear four times in Genesis 32:1-23. Jacob sends every one and every thing ahead of him. He will be left alone, at least temporarily, for a fateful encounter with a strange visitor.

The messengers' report that Esau is coming to meet Jacob with 400 men, which is the same number of men that followed David in military conquest (1 Samuel 22:2, 25:13, 30:10), heightens the tension in the story. Is Esau bent on reconciliation or retaliation? Jacob takes the report as possibly indicative of hostile intentions. He is "greatly afraid and distressed," and he divides his people and livestock into two companies in the hope that at least one will survive if Esau attacks.



# Genesis 32:1-32 Jacob's Problems on Re-entry into the Promised Land

## v9-12 Jacob's Prayer

9 And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who didst say to me, 'Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you,' 10 I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which Thou hast shown to Thy servant; **for** with my staff *only* I crossed this Jordan, **and now I have become two companies.** 11 Deliver me, I pray, **from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for** I fear him, **lest** he come and attack me, the mothers with the children. 12 **For** Thou didst say, 'I will surely prosper you, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'"

"The lives of the patriarchs foreshadow the lives of their descendants". Jacob on his return to the Promised Land had to face Esau, his brother, who wanted to kill him. Israel in their deliverance from Egypt would have to face the "giants" before they entered into the Promised Land. How they responded is found in Numbers 13:27-33. There is yet another Exodus for the people of God (see Jeremiah 16:14-17). Would they learn the lessons from the lives of their fathers? Would we?



# Numbers 13:27-33

27 Thus they told him, and said, “We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there. 29 Amalek is living in the land of the Negev and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites are living in the hill country, and the Canaanites are living by the sea and by the side of the Jordan.”

30 Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, “We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it.”

31 But the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us.” 32 So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size. 33 There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”



# Jeremiah 16:14-17

14 “Therefore behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when it will no longer be said, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ 15 but, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries where He had banished them.’ For I will restore them to their own land which I gave to their fathers. 16 Behold, I am going to send for many fishermen,” declares the LORD, “and they will fish for them; and afterwards I shall send for many hunters, and they will hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and from the clefts of the rocks. 17 For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity concealed from My eyes.”



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4875.html>

He also does something that he hasn't done in the narrative to this point: He prays. Predicaments have marked Jacob's life, yet never is he reported as turning to the Lord in prayer because of them. The fact that he does so now may be indicative both of desperation and growth. Jacob, the strong one, falls to his knees.

Jacob's address is reminiscent of the way God first identified himself to Jacob at Bethel 20 years ago and connects with the Lord's faithfulness to Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 28:13). He also invokes the Lord's recent command to return to the Promised Land, although he interprets the Lord's promise to be with him as a promise to prosper him (Genesis 31:3). Jacob, then, connects with the Lord's history of faithfulness but understands his current predicament as originating from his obedience to the Lord. He therefore bases his appeal on the Lord's faithfulness.

For at least the first 40 years of his life, Jacob would have considered himself a self-made man. He was given few advantages, but he climbed his way to the top by shrewdness and strength of will. His words in verse 10 are all the more remarkable in this light. Jacob confesses his unworthiness, identifies himself as a servant of the Lord and attributes his success to the Lord.



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4875.html>

What changed Jacob? Well, in a word, Haran. His ill-gotten gains in the land of Canaan earned the wrath of his brother, so he fled to Haran and started over. In Haran, he couldn't outmaneuver Laban the way he outmaneuvered Esau. He toiled in hardship for at least 14 years before the Lord's appearance to him in a dream enabled him to advance.

He now sees that the Lord is responsible for his success. He also sees that his unscrupulous methods of advancement make him unworthy of the Lord's care. Haran has taught him that he is unworthy and that the Lord is faithful. When he sees that the Lord is faithful in the face of his unworthiness, he is a changed man.

Fearing Esau, Jacob asks for deliverance, both for himself and his family, and he reminds the Lord once again of his promises concerning the future. The Lord promised Jacob descendants like the "dust of the earth," but in recollecting the promise to be as the "sand of the sea," he traces the promise back to Abraham (Genesis 28:14, 22:17). **Jacob sees the Lord's promises as coming to naught if Esau annihilates his party.**



# Genesis 32:1-32 Jacob's Problems on Re-entry into the Promised Land

## v13-21 Jacob's Presents

13 **So** he spent the night there. Then he selected from what he had with him a present for his brother Esau: 14 **two hundred female goats** and **twenty male goats**, **two hundred ewes** and **twenty rams**, 15 thirty milking camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, **twenty female donkeys** and ten male donkeys. 16 And he delivered *them* into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass on before me, and put a space between droves."

goats - milk, meat, hair (primary major gift);  
sheep – meat & wool (fine garments);  
camels – travel long distances;  
cows – meat & leather;  
donkeys – carrying of burdens & supplies

## Proverbs 18:16

**A man's gift makes room for him,  
And brings him before great men.**



# 2, 20, 200, 2000

Associated with Jacob is the number “two, twenty, two hundred and two thousand”. They speak to issues around the life of Jacob. The two tablets (10 commandments) speak of the spiritual balance between God and man. **The number “two” speaks of balance, and Jacob will always have to balance his walk between the spiritual (the camp of God) and the secular (the camp of Jacob), just as he has to balance his life between his two wives, his two concubines and his two camps (the camp of Leah and the camp of Rachel).** In Jacob’s life, he would always have to navigate the balance between the promises of God and the threats of men.



# Genesis 32:1-32 Jacob's Problems on Re-entry into the Promised Land

17 And he commanded the one in front, saying, “When **my brother Esau** meets you and asks you, saying, ‘To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and to whom do these *animals* in front of you belong?’ 18 then you shall say, ‘These belong to your servant Jacob; it is a present sent to my lord Esau. And behold, he also is behind us.’” 19 Then he commanded also the second and the third, and all those who followed the droves, saying, “After this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him; 20 and you shall say, ‘Behold, your servant Jacob also is behind us.’” For he said, “I will appease him with the present that goes before me. Then afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me.” 21 So the present passed on before him, while he himself spent that night in the camp.



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4875.html>

The words “he spent the night there” were also used in Genesis 28:11, when Jacob spent the night in Bethel. Angels, and the Lord himself, appeared to him that night. By use of the same terminology, the narrator alerts us that this may be no ordinary night.

Jacob spent the night there, but it doesn't look as if he did much sleeping. Having discerned that Esau may have hostile intentions, Jacob makes arrangements for a rather impressive gift. He instructs his servants to approach Esau with the gift in three waves so that it appears all the more impressive. All of the servants are instructed to inform Esau that Jacob is behind them. They are now specifically instructed to call Esau Jacob's "lord" and Jacob Esau's "servant."

In this way, Jacob hopes to appease his brother—literally, “cover his face.” Only then, after Jacob has sent waves of gifts to Esau, will Jacob “see his face” with the hope that Esau will, literally, “accept my face.” Jacob sends the gift, literally, “ahead of his face”—that is, Jacob's face. Jacob fears a face-to-face encounter with Esau. Before he sees the face of Esau, however, he must see the “face” of an even more fearsome visitor (Genesis 32:30).

What are we to make of Jacob's plan? Jacob asks the Lord to deliver him; however, the schemer within springs into action. His elaborate preparations reveal a lack of trust. Jacob is hiding behind the gift just as he once hid behind animal skins. He who always sought to move to the front of the line moves to the rear when his life is in danger. As it turns out, all his preparations proved unnecessary; his prayer was all that was needed. However, the Lord isn't through with Jacob, and the night is not over. Before the sun rises, Jacob will gain new insight into the Lord, himself and his conflict with his brother.



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4875.html>

Jacob takes his family, bringing all his possessions with him, and crosses the Jabbok, a tributary of the Jordan River. The Jabbok was seen as a sort of border to the Promised Land (Numbers 21:24, Deuteronomy 2:37, 3:16; Joshua 12:2; Judges 11:13, 22). In the narrative, it's seen as the last major barrier keeping Jacob and Esau apart.

After seeing his family safely across the river, Jacob separates himself so that he is alone. Twenty years ago Jacob left the Promised Land alone, with neither family nor possessions. He is now returning with a large family and many possessions, but before he returns, he spends the rest of the night alone and without possessions (verse 24). Upon his return to the Promised Land, he in some way re-enacts his departure from it, connecting with a time when he had nothing to place between him and an uncertain future.

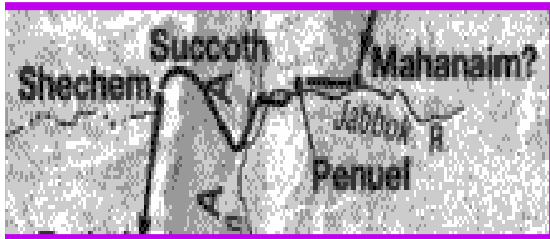
He can't go back. He made a deal that he would not go back to harm Laban. And besides, to return to Haran would be to submit to Laban's harsh rulership again. **The Lord says his future is in the land before him.** But Esau, the brother who had wanted to kill him, is coming out to meet him, appearing as if he's bent on revenge. His family and his possessions have gone before him and Jacob has reached the point of no return. He spends one last night alone to ponder his fate. Twenty years earlier, when Jacob spent the night alone, angels and the Lord himself appeared to him. Angels have appeared to him again on his return trip. Will the Lord show up this night? What goes through Jacob's mind?



# Genesis 32:1-32 Jacob's Problems on Re-entry into the Promised Land

## v22-32 Jacob Wrestles with God

22 Now he arose that same night and took his two wives and his two maids and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 And he took them and sent them across the stream. And he sent across whatever he had.



Yabboq, 7x, Jabbok = “emptying”, a stream which intersects the mountain range of Gilead, and falls into the Jordan on the east about midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea

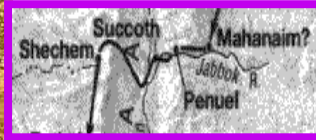
- 4 miles east from Succoth (4 has to do with the things of the Messiah, just as 2 has to do with balance)



Fords of Jabbok River from the North



Jabbok River view to the East from Penuel



Fords of Jabbok River from the South



Jabbok River with Penuel to the East

Yabboq, 7x, Jabbok = “emptying”, a stream which intersects the mountain range of Gilead, and falls into the Jordan on the east about midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea

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# Genesis 32:1-32 Jacob's Problems on Re-entry into the Promised Land

## v22-32 Jacob Wrestles with God

**24** Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. **25** And when he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him.

**26** Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking."

But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

**27** So he said to him, "What is your name?"

And he said, "Jacob."

**28** And he said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed."



# Kiel and Delitzsch

“By his wrestling with God, Jacob entered upon a new stage in his life. As a sign of this, he received a new name, which indicated, as the result of this conflict, the nature of his new relation to God. But whilst Abram and Sarai, from the time when God changed their names (Gen 17:5 and Gen 17:15), are always called by their new names; in the history of Jacob we find the old name used interchangeably with the new. “For the first two names denoted a change into a new and permanent position, effected and intended by the will and promise of God; consequently the old names were entirely abolished. But the name Israel denoted a spiritual state determined by faith; and in Jacob's life the natural state, determined by flesh and blood, still continued to stand side by side with this. Jacob's new name was transmitted to his descendants, however, who were called *Israel* as the covenant nation. For as the blessing of their forefather's conflict came down to them as a spiritual inheritance, so did they also enter upon the duty of preserving this inheritance by continuing in a similar conflict.”



# The Time of Jacob's Trouble = The Great Tribulation (Jeremiah 30:7)

Jeremiah 30:7

Alas! for that day is great,  
There is none like it;  
And it is the time of Jacob's distress,  
But he will be saved from it.

How to get through this night (the tribulation) - tell God your fears for your families and trust God to help you through. Just as Jacob limped along, we are not to run towards our problem or to run away from our problems.

It's been 2,000 years since Israel began wrestling with a certain man "Yeshua" and His argument that He is the Messiah and this issue of Jacob's trouble will not be resolved until Israel comes to terms with and asks for the blessing of Yeshua and He gives it and this blessing is the salvation of Israel and that will be the end of the wrestling period and the full blessing will come at the dawning of the day when the wrestling match is over!



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4876.html>

Jacob is preparing for his meeting with Esau. He has arranged to be by himself, with neither family nor possessions, for one last night before meeting Esau. Jacob, perhaps, is expecting to meet with God again, as he did when he was leaving the Promised Land. Whatever he expected, he couldn't have anticipated this encounter. A mysterious visitor, identified simply as "a man," appears on the bank of the Jabbok River. The narrator gives us Jacob's perspective. It's dark, and all Jacob can say about the visitor is that he's a man.

The visitor doesn't appear simply in order to meet Jacob; he appears in order to fight him. Jacob is worried about his meeting with Esau, but he has more than he can handle with this character. Before he meets—fights?—Esau, he must first fight this man.

Jacob has sent everything ahead of him, and he has no weapon with which to defend himself. However, neither is the visitor carrying a weapon. If the visitor were intent on killing him, it seemed he would have armed himself. The contest is a long one, for it lasts until daybreak. Jacob—and we readers—wonder: What is this man up to?

The narrator gives us a tantalizing hint by using the word “wrestled” (*yabok*), which appears only in this passage in the Old Testament and which in Hebrew sounds like the name Jacob (*yakob*). This wrestling match has something to do with Jacob's name, so it has something to do with his identity and his character. The word “wrestled” is also a play on the name of the river, Jabbok (*yabbok*). On the bank of the river that sounds like his name, Jacob has an encounter that has something to do with his name. The poetry of this encounter suggests that it is a meaningful one.



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4876.html>

The match is even. Jacob was a man of great strength, so this is surprising (Genesis 29:10). The narrator now gives us the perspective of the visitor, who “saw” that he had not prevailed against Jacob. The visitor therefore dislocates the socket of Jacob’s thigh, and he does so with a mere touch. This raises some questions: **Who is this “man” with this strange power? If he has this power, why didn’t he use it earlier? Why doesn’t he simply defeat Jacob instead of wrestling him to a draw? Why doesn’t he kill Jacob?**

Jacob, the man of strength, is injured in a critical area. If he survives this encounter, his wound would make him vulnerable for his confrontation with Esau.

If this man is powerful enough to injure Jacob with a simple touch, he is powerful enough to free himself from Jacob’s grasp. Nevertheless, he asks Jacob to release him. The reason given for his request is that dawn is breaking. The daylight would reveal more of the visitor than he wants known at this time.

Jacob realizes that he’s met his match. He knows he’s in the presence of a superior foe, perhaps a messenger of God of some kind. Remember, prior to this he’s had two encounters with angels (Genesis 28:12, 32:2). And although he’s hobbled, he continues to hold on. Jacob, who came out of the womb grasping the heel of his brother, and has grasped for things his whole life, continues—in pain—to cling to this powerful visitor. Jacob must believe that the man, despite the appearance of hostility, has benevolent intentions. Why cling to someone who can kill you with a mere flick of the wrist unless you trust him?

Jacob holds on because he wants a blessing. No doubt he remembers that Melchizedek, a mysterious visitor from Salem, blessed Abraham, Jacob’s grandfather (Genesis 14:17-20). Jacob posed as Esau in order to get the patriarchal blessing from his



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4876.html>

father. He wants something other than a blessing obtained through trickery. To be blessed because your father thinks you're someone else doesn't, in the end, feel like much of a blessing. Now Jacob knows he's in the presence of someone superior, and he wants a real, face-to-face blessing.

The visitor asks a question that takes Jacob on a tour of his life: "What is your name?" To know someone's name was necessary to give a blessing. The person's name was usually included in the blessing. Jacob's name meant "Heel Grabber," "Supplanter" and "Deceiver" (Genesis 26:26, 27:36) He has been true to his name in his dealings with Esau, Isaac and Laban.

He didn't admit his name when he sought a blessing the first time. His father asked him, "Who are you, my son?" Jacob answered, "I am Esau your firstborn; I have done as you told me. Get up, please, sit and eat of my game, that you may bless me" (Genesis 27:18-20). How will Jacob answer this time? Jacob, who used a multitude of clever words to manipulate the people in his world, including his father the last time he sought a blessing, answers with only one word: "Jacob." And so, for the first time, Jacob confesses. **The mirror that God held up to Jacob's face in Haran has worked. In Haran, Jacob reaped what he had sowed and sowed what he had reaped. He has seen himself, and it isn't a pretty picture.**

Here, then, is a different Jacob. Jacob, who hid behind animal skins to get a blessing from his father and who even moments ago sent a gift ahead of him to protect himself from his brother, comes out of hiding. This Jacob answers with his name. And if he is going to seek a blessing, he will seek it by being himself and admitting his flaws: **"I am Jacob, yes! I am the Heel Grabber! I am the Supplanter! I am the Deceiver! And I want a blessing!"**



<http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4876.html>

The visitor responds by giving Jacob more than a blessing; he gives him a new name: Israel. The name is related to the Hebrew word for “strive.” The visitor connects the name with Jacob’s contentious nature. Jacob has “striven with God and with men.” Jacob’s struggle with men—Esau, Isaac and Laban—has been evident. His struggle with God has been less evident, but it has shown up in his struggle with men, which demonstrated his insistence on doing things his way. But the stranger’s words make one wonder: Is this “man” who Jacob has wrestled with in some sense God?

The visitor declares an intriguing victor in Jacob’s struggles. The victor is Jacob! In his struggles against God and men, Jacob has “prevailed.” Such a conclusion leads us to ask, “How has Jacob prevailed?” The man had not defeated Jacob, though he certainly could have. Neither had Jacob defeated the man. The match was even. How can it be said that Jacob has prevailed? The victory of Jacob is his wound. He fought with God and men so long and hard that he finally snapped—literally. He pushed against life, and it pushed back. He was wounded so that, at least physically, he could fight no longer.

His injury was the final step on the long road to self-discovery. He realized that he could not possibly defeat this man. He understood the limitations of his strength and his wound showed him the weakness of his heel-grabbing approach to life. His greatest defeat, then, was his greatest victory. He had striven with God and men and had been wounded, but the wound was the final lesson that taught him to answer, “Jacob.” The wound also taught him to hold on and ask for a blessing. Here is extraordinary trust: Jacob clings to someone who has the power to kill him in the hope that he will bless him. And so, Jacob gets a new name—that is to say, he gets a new destiny (Genesis 17:5, 15). He has been transformed into the father of a nation—the nation of Israel, the nation that will save all nations. The name Israel evokes Jacob’s injury. It would be a reminder to him that his strength would be in his weakness, which taught him dependence.



# Genesis 32:1-32 Jacob's Problems on Re-entry into the Promised Land

## v22-32 Jacob Wrestles with God

**29** Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there. **30** So Jacob named the place <sup>= facing God</sup> Peniel, for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved."

**31** Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over <sup>= facing God</sup> Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh. **32** Therefore, to this day the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip which is on the socket of the thigh, because he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip.



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4876.html>

So, who is this strange visitor? Jacob wants to know: "Please tell me your name." The man not only refuses to answer the question, he asks *why* Jacob asks it. This interaction foreshadows an encounter between Manoah, Samson's father, and the "angel of the Lord" in Judges 13:17-18, which casts light on the meaning here. The angel of the Lord was a manifestation of God himself, for Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God" (Judges 13:22). The man who wrestled with Jacob, then, seems to be saying, "Don't you know who I am?" The answer to that question, Jacob realizes, or will soon realize, is God... The narrator says nothing about the content of the blessing. Notice that the *place* of blessing becomes more important than its content: "And he blessed him *there*." **God blessed Jacob in the place where he wounded him, so for Jacob, the place of wounding becomes the place of blessing....** Twenty years ago, Jacob named the place where he encountered God Bethel, which means "House of God." This place he names Peniel (or Penuel), which means "Face of God." His reason for doing so is that "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved."

Jacob identifies the mysterious visitor as God himself. In this case, God briefly appeared as a man. One day, he would take the form of a man permanently (John 1:1, Philippians 2:5-11). ...In Jacob's worldview, anyone who has an intimate encounter with God should not expect to survive (Exodus 33:20, Isaiah 6:5). Of all people, Jacob, the deceiver, would expect to be destroyed by such a meeting. Yet, he has been preserved. Both the humility and grace of God are on display. The match is even, God asks Jacob to let him go and Jacob's life is spared.

His hip, however, is not spared. The old Jacob has not survived, either. A new Jacob is born. We are still left to wonder, however: Will Jacob survive his face-to-face encounter with Esau?



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4876.html>

## A New Day for Jacob

The narrator reports a sunrise. He reported a sunset in Genesis 28:11, just before Jacob's encounter with angels and God at Bethel. Since then, it's been 20 years of darkness, so to speak. Finally, as Jacob moves toward the Promised Land, in fulfillment of God's promise to him, he feels the warmth of a new day. It's a new Jacob, a new day, a new era.

In verse 31, the narrator uses a more recognizable spelling—Peniel instead of Peniel—for the name of the place where Jacob wrestled with God (Judges 8:8-9, 17; 1 Kings 12:25). **Jacob leaves the place of his encounter with God and moves forward into his new life. But the place has left its mark on him; God has left his mark on him. He limps into his new life, every step reminding him of this place. Every step reminding him that he is weak and dependent and he will limp into the reunion with Esau that he has dreaded ever since he left the Promised Land.**

The sons of Israel (the nation of Israel) would also be reminded of this place. They would commemorate Jacob's encounter with God by setting aside the sinew of the hip of the animals they ate. The nation would not only remember Jacob by this, it would identify with him. The nation of Israel would prevail by being wounded. She would be a wounded nation, dependent on her God.

Is it any wonder, therefore, that the Messiah of Israel separated himself from others to meet with God alone in the Garden of Gethsemane, as Jacob did by the Jabbok River, and that he was wounded beyond recognition on the cross of Golgotha? **The church of Jesus Christ, like Israel of old, is a wounded people, who take up their crosses, and the pain of the world, in order to bring to it the healing of their Savior.**



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4876.html>

## Wrestling with God

Whatever we expect of our meetings with God, we don't expect to encounter him this way. What if we came to church to worship God and he responded by attacking us? We are usually more concerned about our encounters with the Esaus of our world, until God shows up in apparent hostility. And we know that before we take on whatever it is that terrifies us, we must first take on God himself.

**Our wrestling match with God has something to do with our identity and our character. We want to know, "Who are we? How should we live our lives?" Or, perhaps we don't want to know because we're afraid of the answers. The answers often emerge, whether we like it or not, in our conflicts with God.**

We are often resolute in our resistance to God, wrestling with him into the night, and into the years. Some of us spend our entire lives wrestling with God before yielding to him. Some of us never yield. But, when we're wrestling God, we're contending with someone who has the power to destroy us with the flick of a wrist. We may be strong, but we're not very smart. Nevertheless, God doesn't destroy us; he only wounds us. He wounds us so that we feel vulnerable in our world, without the health or the skills or the intellect or the appearance or the relationships that we consider essential.

Does Jacob's story resonate with you? Do you find yourself, perhaps even to your own surprise, wrestling against God and his will?



# Genesis 33:1-16 – Jacob Meets Esau

1 Then Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, **and behold**, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So **he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids.** 2 And he put the maids and their children in front, and Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. 3 **But** he himself passed on ahead of them and **bowed down to the ground seven times**, until he came near to his brother.



Jacob =  
supplanter,  
deceiver  
Israel =  
prince with  
God



Rachel's maid  
Bilhah = troubled  
Dan = a judge  
Naphtali = wrestling



Leah's maid  
Zilpah = a trickling  
Gad = a troop  
Asher = happy



Leah = weary  
Reuben = Behold a Son  
Simeon = heard or hated  
Levi = joined  
Judah = praise  
Issachar = there is recompense  
Zebulun = exalted  
Dinah = judgment



Rachel = ewe  
Joseph = Jehovah  
has added

# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4876.html>

Jacob passes on ahead of his family. His tendency has always been to move to the front of the line in order to get what he wanted.... Yesterday, when he heard that Esau was coming to meet him, he told his servants, “Pass on before me...” (Genesis 32:16). He arranged for a gift in order to appease Esau—literally, to “cover his face” (Genesis 32:20). His gift was intended to impress Esau and, in a sense, to obscure his vision of Jacob and the theft of the blessing.

Remember, as Jacob moves to the front of the line, he is limping, exposing the injury he suffered in his encounter with the visitor the night before. Not only that, he bows down seven times as he approaches Esau. Jacob doesn't know whether Esau is carrying a knife so he makes himself a sitting—and lame—duck for Esau. He also faces his greatest fear of meeting Esau again head-on.

In bowing down seven times, Jacob is treating Esau as royalty. His deference is striking in light of the blessing that he stole from Esau. Isaac, supposing that he was blessing Esau, told Jacob:

“May peoples serve you;

And nations bow down to you;

Be master of your brothers,

And may your mother's sons bow down to you.” (Genesis 27:29)

Esau was destined from birth to serve Jacob (Genesis 25:23). Isaac, when finally blessing Esau, told him, “And your brother you shall serve” (Genesis 27:40). Now Jacob, the possessor of the blessing, is bowing down to Esau and acting like his brother's servant, as if there's been a reversal of sorts—as if the blessing that he stole belongs to Esau.



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4876.html>

After his wrestling match with God the night before, Jacob confessed, for the first time, that he was “Jacob,” the heel grabber, the deceiver, the manipulator. Before, when he “came close” to Isaac to receive the blessing, he announced that he was Esau (Genesis 27:18-22). Now he comes close to Esau, who appears intent on killing him, not blessing him, and he does so in open vulnerability. Indeed, this is a new Jacob.

The narrator left us hanging as to Jacob’s motivation. He does the same thing in his depiction of Esau. Esau runs to meet Jacob, embraces him and falls on his neck. Each of these actions could be an expression of hostility. Isaac said that Esau would break the yoke of Jacob from his neck (Genesis 27:40). Is Esau not only breaking the yoke of Jacob from his neck but also, literally, breaking Jacob’s neck? The narrator leaves us wondering right up until Esau kisses Jacob.

If Esau “fell on his neck,” he probably kissed Jacob there also. Jacob wore animal skins on his neck to deceive his father into thinking he was Esau, and Jacob kissed his father just before Isaac blessed him (Genesis 27:16, 27). In a sense, Esau is re-enacting the wrong done to him—not for the sake of taking revenge but in the interest of reconciliation. The kiss of death this is not.

After Jacob stole his blessing, Esau “lifted his voice and wept” (Genesis 27:38). When Jacob arrived in Haran and met Rachel, his future wife, “he lifted his voice and wept” (Genesis 29:11). Nary a tear is reported for either brother since then. Twenty years’ worth of fear, resentment and hope are released in this embrace of brothers. Both of them weep. The embrace Jacob wanted from his father but never got comes instead from the brother he betrayed. Don’t be surprised, therefore, if the embrace you want from one person comes from someone else.



# Genesis 33:1-16 – Jacob Meets Esau

4 Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

## The Jots in Genesis 33:4 by Monte Judah

*Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.*

This is the first instance of the Jots (small dots above each letter). Many sages say that the kiss of Esau was disingenuous. What he wanted to do was bite Jacob in the neck with his teeth (the jots). While this seems fascinating, it doesn't hold up for the other instances of the jots. However, an element of this does speak to the other instances of the jots. It has to do with Jacob's flock (his family).



[http://www.lionlamb.net/Yavoh/2004/  
print/Jul2004PN.htm](http://www.lionlamb.net/Yavoh/2004/print/Jul2004PN.htm)

One of the keys to understanding the Enlarged and Small letters is to know what each letter means in its own right. Hebrew letters have specific teachings. The 119th Psalm is written with this mind as each section of the Psalm is preceded by a Hebrew letter (all 22 in sequence).

### 1. The Enlarged Bet Gen 1:1

*In the beginning God created  
the heavens and the earth.*



**Bet means “house.”** Embolding the Bet means that this is the story of how God is building His house. To start a house (a family), a man takes a bride. It is from her that she will establish their home and children will be born and raised. Therefore, from the beginning, it has been God’s plan to build His house by taking a bride and bringing forth children.



[http://www.lionlamb.net/Yavoh/2004/  
print/Jul2004PN.htm](http://www.lionlamb.net/Yavoh/2004/print/Jul2004PN.htm)

## 2. The Small Hey Gen 2:4

*This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven.*



**The letter Hey means to bring forth or to reveal something.** Normally, the letter is used to bring forth or show the glory of God. Abram's name was changed to Abraham by adding the letter Hey. The same happened to his wife Sarai to Sarah. God's name has two Heys in it: Yod-Hey-Vav-Hey. The disciples heard God speak concerning His own name in . I have glorified it and I will glorify it again.

**A small Hey is saying the opposite of the glorification.** Therefore, the second letter of this six letter Hebrew word is made small. It symbolizes the six days of creation and that on the second day (when the heavens were made) that a fall happened. It is speaking of the fall of HaSatan and his angels when they objected to God's plan to take us as His bride.



[http://www.lionlamb.net/Yavoh/2004/  
print/Jul2004PN.htm](http://www.lionlamb.net/Yavoh/2004/print/Jul2004PN.htm)

### 3. The Small Kaf Gen 23:2

*And Sarah died in Kiriath\_arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.*



**Kaf is the letter which means the open hand.** Abraham's mourning for his wife is described as an open hand before God that can not be filled or satisfied. His petition to God for her return could not be fulfilled, therefore his hand remained open.



[http://www.lionlamb.net/Yavoh/2004/  
print/Jul2004PN.htm](http://www.lionlamb.net/Yavoh/2004/print/Jul2004PN.htm)

4. The Small Pey Gen 27:46

*And Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am tired of living because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife from the daughters of Heth, like these, from the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?"*



The fatigue and distress of Rebekah is illustrated by the letter **Pey**. This letter means the back of the head. Not only did Rebekah bow her head but she also turned away from her son and daughters-in-law. By making the letter small, it means there was disappointment and discouragement.



# Genesis 33:1-16 – Jacob Meets Esau

5 And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and the children, and said, **“Who are these with you?”**

So he said, **“The children whom God has graciously given your servant.”** 6 Then the maids came near with their children, and they bowed down. 7 And Leah likewise came near with her children, and they bowed down; and afterward Joseph came near with Rachel, and they bowed down.

8 And he said, **“What do you mean by all this company which I have met?”**

And he said, **“To find favor in the sight of my lord.”**

9 But Esau said, **“I have plenty, my brother; let what you have be your own.”**

10 And Jacob said, **“No, please, if now I have found favor in your sight, then take my present from my hand, for I see your face as one sees the face of God, and you have received me favorably.**



# Genesis 33:1-16 – Jacob Meets Esau

**11** Please take my gift which has been brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have plenty.” **Thus** he urged him and he took *it*.

**12** Then Esau said, “**Let us take our journey and go, and I will go before you.**”

**13** **But** he said to him, “My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds which are nursing are a care to me. And if they are driven hard one day, all the flocks will die. **14** Please let my lord pass on before his servant; and I will proceed at my leisure, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir.”

**15** And Esau said, “**Please let me leave with you some of the people who are with me.**”

**But** he said, “**What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord.**”

**16** **So** Esau returned that day on his way to Seir.



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4876.html>

Jacob's two companies have become one again. Esau, whose intentions were unclear, was coming to meet Jacob. Esau now has "met" Jacob's company. Esau's company appeared to be an army. The word translated "company" in verse 8 (*mahaneh*) sounds like word translated "gift" in verse 10 (*minha*). Is Jacob's company an army or a gift? Jacob instructed his servants to inform Esau that it was a gift, but perhaps Esau retains some suspicion. Moreover, the interaction between the two brothers in verses 5 through 15, particularly Jacob's part, indicates a certain caution.

A significant portion of the livestock, which made up part of the "company," was Jacob's gift to Esau. With this, Jacob hoped to find favor, or grace, in the sight of Esau, who he now calls his "lord." **Jacob has already acted as if the blessing belongs to Esau. He now offers Esau a generous gift. What is Jacob doing? He comes out in the open: He's asking for forgiveness.**

Esau at first resists because he already has an abundance. Even though Jacob had wrenched both the birthright and the blessing from him, Esau still ended up with "plenty." In the end, Jacob's treachery didn't set Esau back. It seems as if that realization—plus 20 years—has softened Esau's heart toward his brother. Jacob's prayer that God would deliver him from Esau also played a part (Genesis 32:9-12). Although Jacob identified himself as Esau's servant, Esau calls Jacob his "brother." Jacob, however, is insistent, just as he was when seeking a blessing from the man who wounded him last night. **Jacob now is seeking for the right things in the right way.**

For Jacob, Esau's acceptance of the present would be a guarantee of the forgiveness he seeks. The word translated "present" was used of the animal sacrifices



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4876.html>

connected with God's forgiveness (Leviticus 1:4, 7:18, 19:7). Jacob equates this meeting of brothers with his encounter with God the night before. He sees Esau's face as "one sees the face of God." Jacob saw God "face to face" and was spared (Genesis 32:30). Indeed, God received him favorably. Now Jacob has had a face-to-face encounter with Esau, who has received him favorably.

Finally, Jacob asks Esau to accept his "gift," which is a different word than the one translated "present" (32:13, 18, 20; 33:10). It is the same word that is translated "blessing" in Genesis 27. Jacob has already acted as if the blessing he stole from Esau belonged to Esau. Now, without revisiting that painful episode again in gut-wrenching detail, he implies that the gift he offers Esau represents the blessing.

Jacob can offer this gift to Esau because he sees that God has dealt graciously with him. God blessed him with family and an abundance of possessions. In the end, Jacob didn't need to steal and connive to get ahead. God, by means of a dream, arranged for Jacob to acquire more livestock than he needed (Genesis 31:11-12). God demonstrated his grace in a supreme way when he wrestled with Jacob, wounded him, gave him a new name and blessed him. **Jacob therefore changes his approach to life.**

Esau has plenty. Jacob has plenty. Everyone has plenty. There's no need to squabble over who has what, or who took what from whom. But there is this matter of forgiveness, which Jacob wants to be sure of. Finally, Esau gets the message. He relents and receives Jacob's gift.

**The grace of God has prepared Jacob to meet Esau in a new way. He makes himself vulnerable, takes responsibility for his sin, makes restitution and seeks forgiveness.**



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4876.html>

Jacob tells Esau that he will meet him at Seir, which is Esau's land, outside the Promised Land. The narrator never reports such a meeting, so we're left to wonder whether it actually took place, or whether Jacob ever intended to meet Esau there. Jacob knows his future is in the Promised Land. He also exercises a certain caution where Esau is concerned. He sees reconciliation with Esau—not proximity to Esau—as necessary, and his words in verses 13 and 14 constitute a polite and artful refusal.

Esau responds by making another offer: to provide Jacob with a military escort as a means of protection. Jacob again refuses. The Lord has promised to protect Jacob and bring him back to the Promised Land (Genesis 28:15). Jacob probably fears that Esau's men may resist him or even turn on him and he doesn't want this kind of connection with Esau. Jacob tells Esau, "Let me find favor in the sight of my lord." He's telling his brother: "The grace you've already given me is more than enough." Once again, Esau yields to Jacob. The brothers part ways, though on much better terms than when Jacob ran away from an angry Esau (Genesis 27:41-43).

Jacob proceeds to Succoth, which is Hebrew for "shelters," where he builds a house and makes booths.



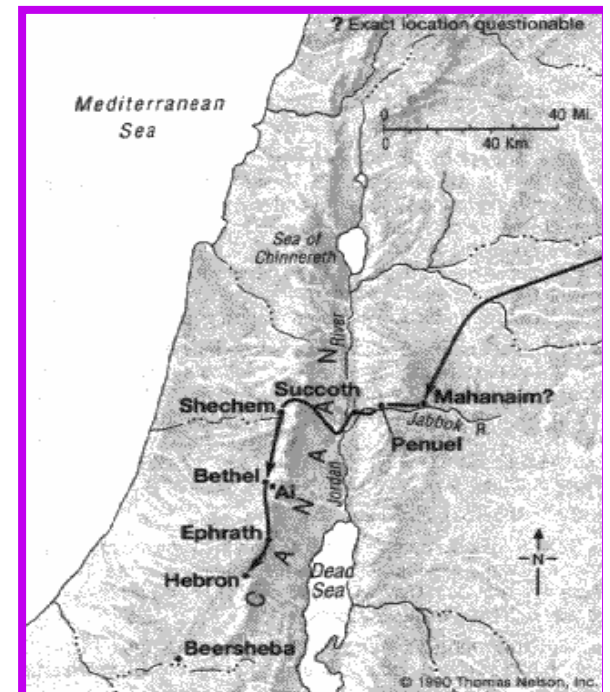
# Genesis 33:17-20 – Jacob’s Return to Canaan

17 And Jacob journeyed to Succoth<sup>= booths</sup>; and built for himself a house, and made booths for his livestock, therefore the place is named Succoth.

<sup>= back or shoulder</sup>  
18 Now Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram, and camped before the city. <sup>= field</sup>

19 And he bought the piece of land where he had pitched his tent from the hand of the sons of Hamor<sup>= he-ass</sup>, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money. 20 Then he erected there an altar, and called it Ei-  
Elohe-Israel. <sup>= the Mighty God of Israel</sup>

Succoth will also be the 1<sup>st</sup> stop for God’s people after the tribulation as they return to the land of Israel. The feast of Succoth will be celebrated in the Kingdom of God (Zech 14:16-21)



Jacob Returns to Canaan

<http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4876.html>

Jacob moves from Succoth, a temporary stopover, to Shechem. He comes, literally, “in peace” to Shechem. Jacob’s vow to make the Lord his God was connected with his returning to his father’s house, literally, “in peace” (Genesis 28:21). He hasn’t quite made it to his father’s house, nor has he pressed on to Bethel, where he vowed to worship the Lord (Genesis 28:22). Jacob, the man of conflict, finally finds peace; however, it won’t last for long.

Shechem is described as being in the land of Canaan, which is a signal for readers familiar with the wickedness of the Canaanites. Jacob sets up camp before the city, much as Lot brought himself into the sphere of Sodom (Genesis 13:12). He **bought property in the Promised Land. Purchasing property in the Promised Land was seen as an expression of faith in God’s promises** (Genesis 23:16).

The narrator introduces the sellers of the land, the sons of Hamor, who will play a key role in the next passage.

Jacob again follows in the footsteps of his grandfather. Having purchased land, as Abraham did, he now erects an altar in Shechem, also as Abraham did (Genesis 12:6-7). **Again, this is an act of faith. He calls the altar “El-Elohe-Israel,” which means “God, the God of Israel.” The Lord has brought Jacob back to the land, as promised, and Jacob has reconciled with Esau. Jacob, who up to this point has identified the Lord as the God of his father, now—finally—calls the Lord his God.**

For all the closure that Genesis 33 brings, two legs of the journey remain. Jacob is still not in Bethel, nor has he returned to his father’s house. His decision to make Shechem something more than a stopover will prove to be disastrous.

Perhaps at this point in our study of the Jacob narrative, we sense a new peace with God, we’re ready to take new steps of faith and we want to call the Lord our God.



# <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4876.html>

## Agents of reconciliation

If the grace we receive in our relationship with God motivates our movement toward reconciliation with those we have injured, then such movement will feature both vulnerability and restitution. It need not, however, feature complete restoration of relationship. The Jacob-Esau story has a better ending than the Cain-Abel story..., which ends in murder. Nevertheless, it is less than satisfying. The schisms between the Jacobs and Esaus of the world are ultimately mended by the blood of Christ.

The prophet Amos looked forward to a time when Israel would “possess the remnant of Edom,” which was the land of Esau’s descendants (Amos 9:11-12). But when James refers to that prophecy, he sees it fulfilled in the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ (Acts 15:16-18).

**The Jacob-Esau story therefore points forward to an even greater story, which features God’s initiative to “reconcile all things to himself” through the blood of Christ (Colossians 1:20).** There is no greater illustration of that story than the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Jesus even uses Esau’s actions, as reported in Genesis 33:4, as a basis for his description of the God-like love of the father for his returning son: “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him [fell on his neck] and kissed him” (Luke 15:20).

**The Parable of the Prodigal Son, and the story of God’s love for the world that it illustrates, inspires hope that the final chapters of our stories of estrangement have yet to be written. Until then, we tell the story of Christ and embody it as agents of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).**

