

The Genesis Stories of Isaac, Jacob, and Esau

Scriptures and References: Genesis 25:19-29:30; *Patriarchs and Prophets* 177-212; *1 Spirit of Prophecy* 105-126; *3 Spiritual Gifts* 113-137; *Story of Redemption* 87-99.

1. Look at the parallels between the story of Ishmael and the story of Isaac. In Genesis 16, Sarah told Abraham to take Hagar as his secondary wife. She became pregnant and proud of her fertility and her child and despised Sarah. When Sarah complained about her, Hagar fled into the desert where an angel appeared to her and told her about the future of her son, Ishmael. Later, as recorded in Genesis 21, Ishmael had a near-death experience and then got married.
2. By comparison, Sarah was told that she would get pregnant and have a son. (Genesis 17) Isaac was born, (Genesis 21) and he had a near-death experience at the end of the trip to Mount Moriah and the offering of Isaac as described in Genesis 22. To complete the comparison, Isaac needed to get married.
3. Read Genesis 24:2,9. The more traditional translations have an expression suggesting that Abraham instructed his servant to place his hand “under his thigh.” The servant did that as described in verse 9. This expression is a euphemism for placing his hand on Abraham’s testicles, touching or grabbing hold of the testicles as a way of swearing or taking an oath. The same custom presumably existed in ancient Rome which thus explains why our English words *testicles*, *testify*, and *testimony* all are derived from the same Latin root word.
4. When Isaac was 40 years old, Abraham sent a trusted servant back to Haran to look for a wife for him. Why wasn’t Isaac allowed to go and pick out his own wife? How many young people today would accept that kind of arrangement? Why do you think things are so different today?
5. Why would Abraham’s servant, the chosen man of God, offer nose rings and bracelets to a potential wife for Isaac? (Genesis 24:22) Would Peter (1 Peter 3:3) and Paul (1 Timothy 2:9) have condemned that?

Once again, we are reminded that things were different in those days. Those gifts were the normal things given in those days to a potential bride. God Himself was pictured as doing something similar in Ezekiel’s day! (See Ezekiel 16:11-13.) By contrast, in Peter’s and Paul’s day, those things often were worn by the “temple prostitutes” who sponsored sexuality as a part of religion. We cannot try to force our cultural norms on people in other times and cultures. There are many, many examples of such cultural differences in biblical times, especially in the times of the Old Testament. Once again, God had more important things to accomplish than to stop everything and try to “straighten out” practices that we might consider questionable today.

6. Some 400 years later, Moses was instructed to tell the people not to marry sisters or cousins or aunts or uncles. However, in the early history of this family as we have it recorded, there was a lot of marriage within one family! (Leviticus 18:6-18) Did this raise any questions in the minds of the people who came along later?
7. Genesis 24 is the longest single story in the Torah. It is like that because Abraham’s instructions to his servant are repeated in detail several times; however, each telling is slightly different. How should we explain those differences?
8. Even though Abraham’s trusted servant was the main character in this story, he was never named. Why is that?

9. Read Genesis 26:1-11. Does this story sound familiar? Note that the title *Abimelech*, which literally means “my father is king,” is not a personal name but rather the title for the king of Gerar of the Philistines. Isaac was behaving just like his father did in a similar situation! Why do you think Isaac was told not to go to Egypt at the time of that famine but rather to go to Philistia?
10. When Isaac was about 60 years old, finally, his wife, Rebekah/Rebecca, had twin sons. How could twin brothers be so different? Were Esau and Jacob identical twins or fraternal twins?
11. Do you think God was responsible for the development of those twins? Or, were they just born in the normal course of events? Why didn't God just arrange for Jacob to be born first? Is there anything really important about being first-born? Does the birth sequence make any real difference?
12. Is there anything magical or significant about being the first male to pass through the birth canal? How many of the biblical giants were not first-born sons? Jacob, Joseph (who was first-born to his mother but not his father), Moses, David, Solomon, etc. Were all of the antediluvian “sons of God” that we know about first-born? Seth was not.
13. In biblical times, the first-born son was supposed to receive the birthright which included two main benefits: 1) He was supposed to receive a double portion of the father's wealth because when his father and mother were elderly, he would be primarily responsible for caring for them. That was the “social security system” of those days. 2) He was also supposed to be the priest of the family and to be the progenitor through whom Christ was to be born. That required special obligations of the first-born son. He was expected to be the spiritual leader of the family.

With these promises Esau and Jacob were familiar. They were taught to regard the birthright as a matter of great importance, for it included not only an inheritance of worldly wealth but spiritual pre-eminence. He who received it was to be the priest of his family, and in the line of his posterity the Redeemer of the world would come. On the other hand, there were obligations resting upon the possessor of the birthright. He [178] who should inherit its blessings must devote his life to the service of God. Like Abraham, he must be obedient to the divine requirements. In marriage, in his family relations, in public life, he must consult the will of God. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 177.3)

14. Read Genesis 25:19-26 and Malachi 1:2-3. Did God choose Jacob over Esau even before he was born? What was implied by the prophecy given to Rebekah? Did God love Jacob and hate Esau? How do you understand the words recorded in Malachi 1? Shouldn't every father be the priest of his own family?

When in answer to Rebekah's troubled prayer he [God] declared that two sons would be given her, he opened to her their future history, that each would become the head of a mighty nation, but that one would be greater than the other, and that the younger would have the pre-eminence. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 177.1) [Content in brackets is added.]

15. Why do you think Esau and Jacob (later named Israel) turned out to be so different from each other? Did God make them that way? Or, did He just foresee that they would be that way?

Romans 9:10-16: ¹⁰ And this is not all. For Rebecca's two sons had the same father, our ancestor Isaac. ¹¹⁻¹² But in order that the choice of one son might be completely the result of God's own purpose, God said to her, "The elder will serve the younger." He said this before they were born, before they had done anything either good or bad; so God's choice was based on his call, and not on anything they had done. ¹³ As the scripture says, "I loved Jacob, but I hated Esau."

¹⁴ Shall we say, then, that God is unjust? Not at all. ¹⁵ For he said to Moses, "I will have mercy on anyone I wish; I will take pity on anyone I wish." ¹⁶ So then, everything depends, not on what human beings want or do, but only on God's mercy. (GNB)

Was God playing "fair" in these events?

16. What is in a name? Esau tended to be known by two names: *Seir* which means "hairy" and Edom (*'admoni*) which means "red." Jacob (in Hebrew *Ya'acob*) is an abbreviated form of the Semitic name *Ya'acob-el* meaning "may God protect." But, in this context, the name is associated with the Hebrew word *Ya'acob* translated "to take by the heel," "to supplant," or "to deceive." (Genesis 27:36)
17. How do you understand the promise given to Rebekah regarding Jacob? Was that a guarantee that the second-born would receive the birthright? Why did both Rebekah and Jacob think that it was absolutely essential that Jacob receive that birthright?
18. If God had promised to make Jacob superior in any way, why was it so difficult for Rebekah and Jacob to patiently wait to see how God would work things out? Do we sometimes get impatient and try to move ahead of God? What does it mean to "move forward in faith"?
19. Both Abraham and Jacob were involved in experiences in which it would have been a much greater exercise of faith to patiently wait for God to work things out. Why is this so hard for most humans to do? How often does God want us to move forward even when we cannot see His guiding hand?
20. Should Genesis 26:1-33 come before Genesis 25? Where were Esau and Jacob when Isaac and Rebekah were living in Gerar?
21. Read Genesis 26:28-29. How much did those pagan rulers of the Philistines know about *Yahweh*?
22. Isaac lived to be 180 years old. At what point in his life did he become basically blind? The last part of Genesis 26 makes it clear that as he moved around the country of Canaan, Isaac continued the practice of Abraham, his father, of building altars wherever he went. What does this say to us about his relationship with God?
23. **Our question focuses on certain promises from God for which the recipients were not willing to wait to be carried out.** For what promises from God should we be waiting in our day? Are we impatient to see God fulfill His promises? While we are waiting for God to fulfill His promises, are we supposed to sit idly by? Or, are we supposed to be active during this wait? Are we supposed to idly wait for the second coming?
24. Read Genesis 27. What was it in the birthright that Jacob and Rebekah wanted? What was it that Esau wanted? Could Isaac have given each son what he wanted? How would things have been different if Jacob had been the first-born son? Couldn't God have arranged that?
25. What difference do the words of a blind old man make? Was God bound by those words?

As we know, Isaac blessed Jacob after being deceived and gave him “fertility” and “dominion.” Did either Jacob or Esau ultimately receive those blessings?

26. Did Jacob really want to be dominant over Esau? Did he really want Isaac’s wealth? How could anyone who knows the nature of God believe that one could call down God’s blessing by repeatedly lying?
27. Why do you think Rebekah preferred Jacob? Why did Isaac prefer Esau? Did Rebekah and Jacob think that—since they believed they were doing God’s will—any methodology was okay? Do the ends ever justify the means?
28. What would have happened if Jacob had refused to cooperate with his mother in deceiving his father? Was Isaac really deceived? How did God feel about those two brothers? (See Genesis 25:23; Malachi 1:2-3; and Romans 9:10-13.)

Before they were born, God had declared that Jacob would be the dominant son. (Genesis 25:23) Esau had agreed to sell the birthright to Jacob. (Genesis 25:27-34) So, if we are to believe that God is ultimately in control, He could have arranged in some way to make certain that Jacob got the spiritual birthright even if Jacob had refused to lie and deceive in order to get it. Of course, in His foreknowledge, God knew how Jacob would actually get the birthright.

Esau did not tell his father that he had sold his birthright to Jacob, and confirmed it with an oath. Rebekah heard the words of Isaac, and she remembered the words of the Lord, “The elder shall serve the younger,” and she **knew that Esau had lightly regarded his birthright and sold it to Jacob.** She persuaded Jacob to deceive his father, and by fraud receive the blessing of his father, which she thought could not be obtained in any other way. Jacob was at first unwilling to practice this deception, but finally consented to his mother’s plans. *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 106,107.

Jacob and Rebekah succeeded in their purpose, but they gained only trouble and sorrow by their deception. God had declared that Jacob should receive the birthright, and His word would have been fulfilled in His own time had they waited in faith for Him to work for them. But like many who now profess to be children of God, they were unwilling to leave the matter in His hands. **Rebekah bitterly repented the wrong counsel she had given her son; it was the means of separating him from her, and she never saw his face again.** From the hour when he received the birthright, Jacob was weighed down with self-condemnation. He had sinned against his father, his brother, his own soul, and against God. In one short hour he had made work for a lifelong repentance. This scene was vivid before him in afteryears, when the wicked course of his sons oppressed his soul. *Patriarchs and Prophets* 180. [Bold type is added.]

It is difficult to know if Isaac was really completely deceived by all of the actions of his wife and Jacob. He was obviously suspicious. (Genesis 27:18-29) In any case, he proceeded to bless Jacob.

Many Christians read the brief account of this story in Romans 9:10-13 and conclude that God predestines people and that we have no choice in the matter. This is a serious misreading of Romans. One needs to go back to the Old Testament and review the context of the quotations used by Paul to see this error in understanding. God did, indeed, say that Esau and his descendants would serve Jacob and his descendants. However, this is not a moral matter taking away anyone’s freedom. The verse stating that God loved Jacob and hated Esau is quoted from the book of Malachi 1:2-3 and was written hundreds of years after

the events of Jacob and Esau occurred. When this statement was written, the descendants of Esau had mostly disappeared from the earth. The descendants of Esau were conquered several different times and were finally completely overrun by the Nabateans in about 300 B.C. Thus, this statement was merely a record of what had already taken place and not a *prediction* or a predestination of what was to take place.

29. Review carefully the role of each of the four participants in this saga. Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, and Jacob. Were any of them truly innocent? Review the deeds, the character, and the motives of each of the participants.

- a. Isaac: Did not consult with his wife, did not recognize the true character of his sons, ignored God's word, and tried to defeat God's plan.
- b. Rebekah: Assumed she understood God's will, argued with her husband, planned deceit, ran ahead of God, and schemed with Jacob to deceive her husband.
- c. Esau: Despised the birthright, did not care about spiritual matters, lived for the moment, was a hunter of wild game, and chose to ignore God's promise.

Esau grew up loving self-gratification and centering all his interest in the present. Impatient of restraint, he delighted in the wild freedom of the chase, and early chose the life of a hunter. Yet he was the father's favorite. The quiet, peace-loving shepherd [Isaac] was attracted by the daring and vigor of this elder son, who fearlessly ranged over mountain and desert, returning home with game for his father and with exciting accounts of his adventurous life. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 177.2) [Content in brackets is added.]

- d. Jacob: Lied, schemed, envied, ran ahead of God, deceived his father, and stayed more at home.

Jacob, thoughtful, diligent, and care-taking, ever thinking more of the future than the present, was content to dwell at home, occupied in the care of the flocks and the tillage of the soil. His patient perseverance, thrift, and foresight were valued by the mother. His affections were deep and strong, and his gentle, unremitting attentions added far more to her happiness than did the boisterous and occasional kindnesses of Esau. To Rebekah, Jacob was the dearer son. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 177.2)

30. As a result of Jacob's deception and Esau's anger, Jacob and Rebekah decided it was best that Jacob flee to the home of Laban to find a wife. The wives of Esau provided a very timely excuse. (Genesis 26:34-35)

31. How would you feel about leaving on a 500-mile journey with nothing but what you could carry on your back, traveling through territories of marauding tribes and wild animals?

Threatened with death by the wrath of Esau, Jacob went out from his father's home a fugitive; but he carried with him the father's blessing; Isaac had renewed to him the covenant promise, and had bidden him, as its inheritor, to seek a wife of his mother's family in Mesopotamia. Yet it was with a deeply troubled heart that Jacob set out on his lonely journey. With only his staff in his hand he must travel hundreds of miles through a country inhabited by wild, roving tribes. In his remorse and timidity he sought to avoid men, lest he should be traced by his angry brother. He feared that he had lost forever the blessing that God had purposed to give him; and **Satan was at hand to**

press temptations upon him. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 183.1) [Bold type is added.]

32. How well do you think you would sleep laying on the dirt with a rock as a pillow? No doubt, Jacob felt completely alone. Fortunately, he recognized that God was still with him. Before lying down, he confessed his sin with weeping and deep humiliation and asked the Lord for some evidence that he was not utterly forsaken. (See *Patriarchs and Prophets* 183.)
33. What lessons are we supposed to learn from the vision of the ladder? (Genesis 28:10-22) Had Jacob developed a program of regular communication with God? Or, was this vision an entirely new experience? (See *Patriarchs and Prophets* 183.4-184.3.)
34. What does it tell us about God that through a dream He took time to reassure a homeless, poor, cheating wanderer? What did the onlooking universe learn from this story?

Jacob at the Home of Laban

35. This section covers Genesis 29-33 which recount the story of Jacob's experiences in the household of Laban and his return home. As you review those 20 years in the life of Jacob, how would you evaluate his spiritual growth?
36. When Jacob finally arrived at the correct destination, his first contact with the family of Laban was with Rachel who had been herding sheep. Since she had brothers, why do you think Rachel was herding sheep? Were the brothers too young? Where there more dangerous jobs for the brothers?
37. If Jacob was so attracted to Rachel that he loved her almost immediately, were other young men in the area attracted to her as well? Why do you think Laban insisted that Leah be married first? Was he really worried that she would not be able to get married? Or, was there a custom in that region that Laban was following? Or, did he want to find an excuse to hold Jacob for another seven years?
38. What do you think Jacob should have done when he woke up in the morning and found out that he was married to Leah and had spent the night with her? How do you think that deception was actually carried out? Should he have rejected Leah? Should he have taken Rachel and run home? Should Jacob have said: "Now that I am married to Leah, I guess I better stick with her"? Was Jacob morally and ethically married to Leah? Wasn't Leah a part of the deception? Did Rachel assist in the deception?
39. Why do you think Leah was able to have so many children and Rachel so few? Was God involved in any way? Why do you think Jacob accepted Bilhah and Zilpah as secondary wives? Didn't he have enough trouble with two?
40. Aren't Jacob's children the ones whose names are going to be written on the gates of the New Jerusalem? (Revelation 21:12) Why would God choose those names?
41. In our day, do we ever face the kind of scheming bosses or relatives that Jacob faced?
42. In Jacob's time at Haran, two or three "magical" things are mentioned that were believed to accomplish powerful results. What do we know about mandrakes? Are they of any significance whatsoever?

Mandrakes. [Heb. *dûda' îm.*] An herb of the belladonna family (*Mandragora officinarum*), bearing an odoriferous applelike or tomatolike fruit. Ancients believed the mandrake possessed qualities that would stimulate sensual

desire and encourage fertility. It does produce a narcotic effect, and is known to have been used medicinally in former times. The supposed aphrodisiac value is implied in the Biblical usage (Gen 30:14-16; Song 7:13). (*SDA Bible Dictionary*)

43. After Jacob had worked 14 years for his two primary wives, he began to work for wages. Laban did certain things to try to minimize Jacob's wages; Jacob tried to do things to maximize his wages! Have things changed at all in our world?
44. Did the experiment with the peeled sticks have any effect whatsoever on the color of the sheep that were born? Do you think God allowed the normal effects of genetics to play out? Or, did He alter things to give special blessings to Jacob? Is this passage proof that the Bible is unscientific and full of ancient nonsense?

Genesis 30:41-43: ⁴¹ When the healthy animals were mating, Jacob put the branches in front of them at the drinking troughs, so that they would breed among the branches. ⁴² But he did not put the branches in front of the weak animals. Soon Laban had all the weak animals, and Jacob all the healthy ones. ⁴³ In this way Jacob became very wealthy. He had many flocks, slaves, camels, and donkeys. (*GNB*)

What was the real reason Jacob was so successful?

Genesis 31:10-12: [Jacob said:] ¹⁰ "During the breeding season I had a dream, and I saw that the male goats that were mating were striped, spotted, and speckled. ¹¹The angel of God spoke to me in the dream and said, 'Jacob!' 'Yes,' I answered. ¹²'Look,' he continued, 'all the male goats that are mating are striped, spotted, and speckled. I am making this happen because I have seen all that Laban is doing to you.'" (*GNB*)

45. After a total of 20 years in Laban's household, Jacob realized that Laban's sons were becoming very jealous and antagonistic. So, he arranged to take his wives, children, flocks, herds, and servants and depart secretly. (Genesis 31:1-21) Why do you think Jacob waited so long? Was he more afraid of Esau? Or, of Laban and his sons?
46. Why do you think Rachel stole her father's household "gods" when they were departing? Was she still hoping for some miracle of fertility? She had already had Joseph? Do we have any idea what kind of "gods" those were?

These "images," *teraphim* (see Judges 17:5; 18:14; etc.), were usually small (v. 34) human figurines, occasionally larger, often made of wood (1 Samuel 19:13-16). Near Eastern excavations have brought them to light in profuse numbers, made of wood, clay, and precious metals. Some represent male gods, but the majority are figurines of female deities 2 to 3 in. length. They were used as household gods or were carried on the body as protective charms. Since most of them represent nude goddesses whose sexual features are accentuated, they were probably thought to promote fertility. This may be the reason Rachel especially cherished them. Cuneiform texts from Nuzi in Mesopotamia reveal that the household gods were inherited by adopted sons only when no actual sons were present at the father's death. If a man had sons, his gods could not go to his daughters. Rachel therefore had no right to her father's household gods, as Jacob frankly admitted (Gen. 31:32). Documents found at Nuzi, in Mesopotamia, indicate that in the patriarchal age the possession of the family's household gods, such as Laban

had, guaranteed to their holder the title to his father's properties (*ANET* 219, 220). This was probably the chief reason why Laban was so eager to retrieve them (see Gen. 31:30,33-35). (*SDA Bible Commentary* on Genesis 31:19)

47. After Jacob found out that Rachel had taken the idols, do you think he allowed her to keep them?

48. It has been taught and believed by many Christians in the last century that the Ur from which Abraham moved was in southern Iraq. There are a number of reasons to believe that is not correct. It is much more likely that the correct Ur (now called Urfa) is located in southeastern Turkey not far from Haran. Both are in "Mesopotamia," that is, between the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers. The Ur in southern Iraq is on the western side of the Euphrates so that someone coming from there would not need to cross the Euphrates to reach Palestine. It is interesting to note what Ellen White wrote about the story when Jacob started on his journey from Laban's home with his family.

Laban's absence afforded opportunity for departure. The flocks and herds were speedily gathered and sent forward, and with his wives, children, and servants, **Jacob crossed the Euphrates**, urging his way toward Gilead, on the borders of Canaan. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 193.2) [Bold type is added.]

49. Read carefully Genesis 31:53-54 describing the final meal and separation of Jacob and Laban. If God had not appeared in a vision to Laban, would Laban have harmed Jacob? Is there any evidence in the Bible that there was any further contact between the descendants of Terah in Mesopotamia and the descendants of Abraham in Canaan?

The night was spent in friendly communing; and at the dawn of day, Laban and his company departed. With this separation ceased all trace of connection between the children of Abraham and the dwellers in Mesopotamia. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 194.1)

50. As Jacob took his family into the area of Gilead, he began to think about meeting his brother, Esau.

51. What is the meaning of Genesis 32:1-2? In a short period of time, God or His angels appeared to Laban, Jacob (on at least two occasions), and Esau. Do you wish that God would appear in your life in these striking ways? Or, are we better off with all the material of Scripture to guide us? If God appeared to you like this, how would it affect you? Who else would demand equal time? Would you like to receive a vision or a visit from the Devil?

As he traveled southward from Mount Gilead, two hosts of heavenly angels seemed to encompass him behind and before, advancing with his company, as if for their protection. Jacob remembered the vision at Bethel so long before, and his burdened heart grew lighter at this evidence that the divine messengers who had brought him hope and courage at his flight from Canaan were to be the guardians of his return. And he said, "This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim"--"two hosts, or, camps." (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 195.3)

As Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him. And when he saw them, he said, "This is God's host." He saw the angels of God, in a dream, encamping around about him. (*1 Spirit of Prophecy* 117.2)

52. What happened that night beside the Jabbok River? What was God trying to teach Jacob as they wrestled together? Did Jacob know who he was fighting with? (See Genesis 32:28.)

Why did He approach Jacob in that way? Does God usually appear to us as an adversary? (Compare Joshua 5:13-15.) Was there any special significance to this nighttime battle? Why did God change Jacob's name at that point? Why did He apparently refuse to tell Jacob His name? Notice Jacob's response at the end of their conversation: "I have seen God face to face, and I am still alive." (Genesis 32:30) Was God just playing with Jacob? Is there any way that Jacob could have, in fact, wrestled with God and overcome Him? Why was he given the name "God struggles" or "may God struggle"? How do you understand Genesis 32:28?

Jacob's experience during that night of wrestling and anguish represents the trial through which the people of God must pass just before Christ's second coming. The prophet Jeremiah, in holy vision looking down to this time, said, "We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. . . . All faces are turned into paleness. Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it." Jeremiah 30:5-7.

When Christ shall cease His work as mediator in man's behalf, then this time of trouble will begin. Then the case of every soul will have been decided, and there will be no atoning blood to cleanse from sin. When Jesus leaves His position as man's intercessor before God, the solemn announcement is made, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." Revelation 22:11. Then the restraining Spirit of God is withdrawn from the earth. As Jacob was threatened with death by his angry brother, so the people of God will be in peril from the wicked who are seeking to destroy them. And as the patriarch wrestled all night for deliverance from the hand of Esau, so the righteous will cry to God day and night for deliverance from the enemies that surround them.

Satan had accused Jacob before the angels of God, claiming the right to destroy him because of his sin; he had moved upon Esau to march against him; and during the patriarch's long night of wrestling, Satan endeavored to force upon him a sense of his guilt, in order to discourage him, and break his hold upon God. . . .

Had not Jacob previously repented of his sin in obtaining the birthright by fraud, God could not have heard his prayer and mercifully preserved his life. So in the time of trouble, if the people of God had unconfessed sins to appear before them while tortured with fear and anguish, they would be overwhelmed; despair would cut off their faith, and they could not have confidence to plead with God for deliverance. But while they have a deep sense of their unworthiness, they will have no concealed wrongs to reveal. Their sins will have been blotted out by the atoning blood of Christ, and they cannot bring them to remembrance.

Satan leads many to believe that God will overlook their unfaithfulness in the minor affairs of life; but the Lord shows in His dealing with Jacob that He can in no wise sanction or tolerate evil. All who endeavor to excuse or conceal their sins, and permit them to remain upon the books of heaven, unconfessed and unforgiven, will be overcome by Satan. The

more exalted their profession, and the more honorable the position which they hold, the more grievous is their course in the sight of God, and the more certain the triumph of the great adversary.

Yet Jacob's history is an assurance that God will not cast off those who have been betrayed into sin, but who have returned [203] unto Him with true repentance. It was by self-surrender and confiding faith that Jacob gained what he had failed to gain by conflict in his own strength. God thus taught His servant that divine power and grace alone could give him the blessing he craved. **Thus it will be with those who live in the last days. As dangers surround them, and despair seizes upon the soul, they must depend solely upon the merits of the atonement. We can do nothing of ourselves. In all our helpless unworthiness we must trust in the merits of the crucified and risen Saviour. None will ever perish while they do this. The long, black catalogue of our delinquencies is before the eye of the Infinite. The register is complete; none of our offenses are forgotten. But He who listened to the cries of His servants of old, will hear the prayer of faith and pardon our transgressions. He has promised, and He will fulfill His word.**

Jacob prevailed because he was persevering and determined. His experience testifies to the power of importunate prayer. It is now that we are to learn this lesson of prevailing prayer, of unyielding faith. The greatest victories to the church of Christ or to the individual Christian are not those that are gained by talent or education, by wealth or the favor of men. They are those victories that are gained in the audience chamber with God, when earnest, agonizing faith lays hold upon the mighty arm of power.

Those who are unwilling to forsake every sin and to seek earnestly for God's blessing, will not obtain it. But all who will lay hold of God's promises as did Jacob, and be as earnest and persevering as he was, will succeed as he succeeded. "Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily." Luke 18:7, 8. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 201.1-203.2) [Bold type is added.]

53. Jacob's struggle that night is referred to as "the time of Jacob's trouble." The time of trouble at the end of this earth's history after Jesus leaves the most holy place in heaven and descends to this earth is also referred to as "the time of Jacob's trouble." Why would that be? What should we learn about that time from Jacob's experience? The Bible speaks about "the time of Jacob's trouble" in Jeremiah 30:7.

I saw that the four angels would hold the four winds until Jesus' work was done in the sanctuary, and then will come the seven last plagues. These plagues enraged the wicked against the righteous; they thought that we had brought the judgments of God upon them, and that if they could rid the earth of us, the plagues would then be stayed. A decree went forth to slay [37] the saints, which caused them to cry day and night for deliverance. This was the time of Jacob's trouble. (*Early Writings* 36.2)

When in his distress Jacob laid hold of the Angel, and made supplication with tears, the heavenly Messenger, in order to try his faith, also reminded him of

his sin, and endeavored to escape from him. But Jacob would not be turned away. He had learned that God is merciful, and he cast himself upon His mercy. He pointed [202] back to his repentance for his sin, and pleaded for deliverance. As he reviewed his life, he was driven almost to despair; but he held fast the Angel, and with earnest, agonizing cries urged his petition until he prevailed.

Such will be the experience of God's people in their final struggle with the powers of evil. God will test their faith, their perseverance, their confidence in His power to deliver them. Satan will endeavor to terrify them with the thought that their cases are hopeless; that their sins have been too great to receive pardon. They will have a deep sense of their shortcomings, and as they review their lives their hopes will sink. But remembering the greatness of God's mercy, and their own sincere repentance, they will plead His promises made through Christ to helpless, repenting sinners. Their faith will not fail because their prayers are not immediately answered. They will lay hold of the strength of God, as Jacob laid hold of the Angel, and the language of their souls will be, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." [Genesis 32:26] (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 201.3-202.1; *Conflict and Courage* 68.4-5) [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

54. Look at all the things that Jacob did to appease Esau. Did any of those things make any difference? What was Esau's original intent when he set out to meet Jacob?

While Jacob was wrestling with the Angel, another heavenly messenger was sent to Esau. In a dream, Esau beheld his brother for twenty years an exile from his father's house; he witnessed his grief at finding his mother dead; he saw him encompassed by the hosts of God. This dream was related by Esau to his soldiers, with the charge not to harm Jacob, for the God of his father was with him.

The two companies at last approached each other, the desert chief leading his men of war, and Jacob with his wives and children, attended by shepherds and handmaidens, and followed by long lines of flocks and herds. **Leaning upon his staff, the patriarch went forward to meet the band of soldiers. He was pale and disabled from his recent conflict, and he walked slowly and painfully, halting at every step; but his countenance was lighted up with joy and peace.**

At sight of that crippled sufferer, "Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept." [Genesis 33:4] **As they looked upon the scene, even the hearts of Esau's rude soldiers were touched. Notwithstanding he had told them of his dream, they could not account for the change that had come over their captain.** Though they beheld the patriarch's infirmity, they little thought that this his weakness had been made his strength. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 198.2-4) [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

55. Review Jacob's prayer before meeting Esau. (Genesis 32:9-12) Jacob seemed to be doing everything he could and then asked for God to help beyond that. Should that be our usual approach to every problem? After reviewing this complete experience, compare your own

experience. Do you ever strive with God? Do you ever succeed as Jacob did? Do you ever wrestle with God in prayer? What does that mean?

56. There are several people listed in Scripture who had their names changed by God: Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Joshua, Paul, and Peter—to mention a few. Why did God change these people's names?
57. The Jacob cycle builds to a focal point, or pivot point, at Genesis 30:22-26. After that, the themes and stories are repeated in reverse order, creating a chiasmic structure.
- In Genesis 30:22-26, Rachel gave birth to Joseph; and Jacob decided it was time to return to Canaan.
 - There are six episodes (A, B, C, D, E, F), followed by six parallel episodes (F', E', D', C', B', A').
 - The result of this pattern is a carefully constructed symmetrical structure in what was already a well-unified story.
 - Though not indicated in the chart below, each of the matching episodes in the story or cycle is linked by a series of key words (for example, *paga'*, which means *encounter*, in Genesis 28:11 and Genesis 32:2).

The Jacob Cycle

A Oracle sought, struggle in childbirth, Jacob and Esau were born (Genesis 25:19-34)

B Interlude: Rebekah in a foreign palace, pact with foreigners (Genesis 26:1-34)

C Jacob feared Esau and fled (Genesis 27:1-28:9)

D Messengers (Genesis 28:10-22)

E Arrival at Haran (Genesis 29:1-30)

F Jacob's wives were fertile (Genesis 29:31-30:24)

Focal point: **a)** Rachel gave birth to Joseph

b) Jacob decided to return to Canaan

F' Jacob's flocks were fertile (Genesis 30:25-43)

E' Flight from Haran (Genesis 31:1-34)

D' Messengers (Genesis 32:1-32)

C' Jacob returned and feared Esau (Genesis 33:1-20)

B' Interlude: Dinah in a foreign palace, pact with foreigners (Genesis 34:1-31)

A' Oracle fulfilled, struggle in childbirth, Jacob became Israel (Genesis 35:1-22)

58. Do you think there is any way this incredible pattern could have occurred by accident when some editor/redactor was putting together pieces of the story from several different authors as the higher critics claim? And this pattern is repeated in the Abraham cycle and the Joseph story as well.

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