

Beginnings and Belongings

Jacob Becomes Israel

Lesson #11 for December 16, 2006

Scripture: Genesis 29–33.

1. This lesson covers 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?
2. When Jacob finally arrived at the correct destination, his first contact with the family of Laban was with Rachel who had been herding sheep. Why do you think Rachel was herding sheep if she had brothers?
3. 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 did he want to find an excuse to hold Jacob for another seven years?
4. What do you think Jacob should have done when he woke up in the morning and found out that he was married to Leah? How do you think this deception was actually carried out? Should he have rejected Leah? Should he have taken Rachel and run home? Should he have said, "Well, now, I'm married to Leah and that's it?"
5. 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?
6. 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 these names?
7. In our day do we ever face the kind of scheming bosses or relatives that Jacob faced?
8. In this lesson 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'im*.] 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*)

9. 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 and Jacob tried to do things to maximize his wages! Have things changed at all in our world?
10. 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. ⁴²But 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. ⁴³In 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: 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)

11. 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?
12. Why do you think Rachel stole her father’s household “gods” when they were departing? Was she still hoping for some miracle of fertility? Do we have any idea what kind of “gods” these 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 Sam. 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 vss. 30,33–35). (SDA Bible Commentary on Genesis 31:19)

13. After Jacob found out that Rachel had taken the idols, do you think he allowed her to keep them?
14. Read carefully Genesis 31:53,54, the final meal and separation of Jacob and Laban. If God had not appeared in a vision to Laban would he have done Jacob harm? 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?
15. As Jacob took his family into the area of Gilead, he began to think about meeting his brother Esau.
16. 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?

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." {PP 195.3}

17. What happened that night beside the Jabbock River? Who was fighting with Jacob? Why did he approach Jacob in this way? Does God usually appear to us as an adversary? 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." Was God just playing with Jacob? Is there any way that Jacob could have, in fact, wrestled with God and overcome him? Why is he given the name "God struggles" or "may God struggle"? How do you understand Genesis 32:28?
18. Look at all the things that Jacob did to appease Esau. Did any of these things make any difference? What was Esau's original intent when he set out to meet Jacob? 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 referred to as "the time of Jacob's trouble." Why would this be? What should we learn about that time from this experience? The Bible speaks about "the time of Jacob's trouble." (Jeremiah 30:7)

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. {EW 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 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. {CC 68.4}

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." {CC 68.5}

19. Review Jacob's prayer before meeting Esau. (Genesis 32:9-12) Jacob seems to be doing everything he can and then asking for God to help beyond that. Should this be our usual approach to every problem? After reviewing this complete experience, compare your own. Do you ever strive with God? Do you ever succeed as Jacob did?
20. There are several people in Scripture who had their names changed by God: Abraham, Sarah, Jacob and Peter—to mention a few. Why did God change these people's names?

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