

The First Family

Date: 5.31.2026 | Jacob Wrestles with God
Scripture: Genesis 32-33 and 35:1-15

CENTRAL TRUTHS



PRESCHOOL:

God helps us and wants us to trust Him.

YOUNGER KIDS (K5-2ND GRADE):

God helped Jacob, and Jacob trusted God and made things right with his brother.

OLDER KIDS (3RD-5TH GRADE):

God changed Jacob and helped him make peace with Esau, showing that God keeps His promises and wants us to trust and obey Him.

STUDENTS:

God transformed Jacob through wrestling and repentance, leading him to trust God, be reconciled with Esau, and return to worship—demonstrating God’s faithfulness to His covenant promises.

ADULTS:

Through Jacob’s wrestling, reconciliation, and return to Bethel, God reveals His transforming grace—humbling His people, calling them to repentance, and restoring relationships. Faithful to His covenant, God brings His purposes to fulfillment while inviting His people into lives marked by trust, reconciliation, and wholehearted worship.

MEMORY VERSE

So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.
Galatians 3:9



DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

God Almighty - El Shaddai - Shadah can refer to sufficiency to provide; however, this particular name of God is from the root word shadad, which refers to power. Being almighty, God has the power to provide, the power to protect, and the power to chasten or destroy in judgment. - John MacArthur Biblical Doctrine, 158

BACKGROUND INFO FOR LEADERS

Years after Jacob's marriages, the birth of his children, and his long service under Laban, God commanded Jacob to return to the land of Canaan—the land promised to Abraham and Isaac (**Genesis 31:3**). After finally separating peacefully from Laban, Jacob begins the difficult journey home, where he must face the brother he deceived nearly twenty years earlier. As Jacob travels, “the angels of God” meet him (**Genesis 32:1**). This phrase appears only one other time in the Old Testament—at Bethel when Jacob first fled Canaan and saw angels ascending and descending on the ladder in his dream (**Genesis 28:12**). God is reminding Jacob that the same Lord who met him when he fled is still with him now as he returns.



Though God had promised to protect him, Jacob is fearful about meeting Esau. The last time Jacob saw his brother, Esau intended to kill him after Jacob stole both his birthright and blessing (**Genesis 27:41–42**). Hoping to show humility and peaceful intentions, Jacob sends messengers ahead with gifts of livestock and servants, respectfully referring to Esau as “my lord” and seeking to “find favor” in his sight (**Genesis 32:3–5**). But when the messengers return, they report that Esau is coming to meet Jacob—with four hundred men (**Genesis 32:6**). Jacob is immediately overcome with fear and distress.

In response, Jacob divides his people and possessions into two camps, reasoning that if Esau attacks one camp, the other may escape (**Genesis 32:7–8**). While understandable from a human perspective, Jacob's actions reveal that he still struggles to fully trust God's promise of protection. Throughout Scripture, fear and distress often expose the weakness of human faith, yet God repeatedly reminds His people not to fear because He is with them (**Deuteronomy 31:8; Isaiah 44:8; Luke 12:32**). This same promise is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who is called Immanuel—“God with us” (**Matthew 1:23**), the One who promises never to leave nor forsake His people (**Matthew 28:20**).

For the first time in Scripture, Jacob personally addresses God as Yahweh—“LORD” (*Genesis 32:9*). His prayer reflects growing faith and humility. He appeals to God’s covenant promises to Abraham and Isaac, reminds God of His command to return to Canaan, and confesses his own unworthiness: “I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that You have shown to Your servant” (*Genesis 32:10*). Jacob remembers that he left Canaan with only his staff, yet now returns with wives, children, servants, and great wealth. He pleads with God to deliver him from Esau’s hand.

Still seeking to pacify his brother, Jacob sends extravagant gifts ahead in waves and then sends his family across the Jabbok River while he remains alone for the night (*Genesis 32:13–23*). There, in the darkness, Jacob experiences one of the most mysterious and significant encounters in all of Genesis: a man wrestles with him until daybreak (*Genesis 32:24*). When the man sees that Jacob will not give up, he touches Jacob’s hip and puts it out of joint (*Genesis 32:25*). Yet Jacob refuses to let go, declaring, “I will not let You go unless You bless me” (*Genesis 32:26*).

The man asks Jacob his name, and when Jacob answers, he says, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed” (*Genesis 32:28*). Jacob’s renaming marks a major turning point in his life. The name “Jacob” had become associated with grasping, deceiving, and striving in his own strength. But now God gives him a new name—Israel—marking him as transformed by divine grace. This climactic moment summarizes Jacob’s life of struggle: he wrestled with Esau, Isaac, Laban, his wives, and now with God Himself. Through these years of striving, Jacob learns that true blessing cannot be seized through manipulation—it can only be received from God’s hand.

Jacob names the place Peniel, meaning “face of God,” saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered” (*Genesis 32:30*). The limp Jacob carries away from Peniel serves as a permanent reminder that God breaks His people of self-reliance to teach them dependence on Him. Often God wounds before He heals, humbles before He exalts, and weakens before He strengthens.

The next day, Jacob finally meets Esau. Still humbled, he bows to the ground seven times as he approaches his brother in submission (*Genesis 33:3*). Yet instead of attacking, Esau runs to meet Jacob, embraces him, falls on his neck, and kisses him. They weep together

(Genesis 33:4). The brother Jacob feared becomes the brother who forgives him. God had not only protected Jacob—He had gone before him and changed Esau’s heart. Jacob recognizes this grace, telling Esau, “To see your face is like seeing the face of God, since you have accepted me” *(Genesis 33:10)*. The favor Jacob receives from Esau mirrors the undeserved favor he had just received from God at Peniel.

Later, in *Genesis 35*, God commands Jacob to return to Bethel. In this place, God first appeared to him when he fled from Esau years earlier *(Genesis 35:1)*. There, Jacob tells his household to put away their foreign gods, purify themselves, and prepare for worship *(Genesis 35:2–4)*. This demonstrates Jacob’s growing spiritual leadership and renewed devotion to the Lord. At Bethel, Jacob builds an altar, fulfilling the vow he made in *Genesis 28:20–22* and publicly worshipping the God who has been faithful to him.

Then God appears to Jacob again, reaffirms his new name Israel, and repeats the covenant promises first given to Abraham: that kings and nations will come from him, and that the land promised to Abraham and Isaac will now belong to him and his descendants *(Genesis 35:9–12)*. Jacob responds by setting up a pillar, pouring out a drink offering, and worshipping God *(Genesis 35:14–15)*.

These chapters mark the transformation of Jacob from a fearful, striving deceiver into Israel, the covenant patriarch through whom God’s promises will continue. Yet Jacob’s transformation points beyond himself to the greater work God accomplishes in all His people through Christ. Like Jacob, we are sinners who strive, manipulate, fear, and fail. But God, in His grace, pursues undeserving people, transforms them by His presence, and gives them a new identity. Through Jesus Christ, the ultimate promised offspring of Abraham, God reconciles sinners to Himself—not because we earn His favor, but because Christ wrestled in our place, bore our judgment, and secured our blessing through His death and resurrection. In Christ, we too are given a new name, a new identity, and the assurance that God will keep every promise He has made.

TELL THE STORY

Genesis 32-33 & 35:1-15



The Biggest Story Bible Storybook - Blessings in the Night

Years had passed since Jacob left home. During that time, he married, had many children, and became very wealthy. At last, God told Jacob it was time to return to the land of Canaan—the land God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and now Jacob (*Genesis 31:3*). But Jacob was afraid. The last time he had seen his brother Esau, Esau wanted to kill him because Jacob had stolen his blessing (*Genesis 27:41*).

As Jacob traveled home with his family, he heard that Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men. Jacob was terrified! He prayed and asked God to protect him, remembering God's promise to be with him (*Genesis 32:9-12*). That night, after sending his family ahead, Jacob stayed alone. Suddenly, a man appeared and wrestled with Jacob all night long (*Genesis 32:24*). Jacob refused to quit. Even after the man touched Jacob's hip and injured it, Jacob held on and said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me" (*Genesis 32:26*).

Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob. Your name will be Israel, because you have wrestled with God and with men, and have prevailed" (*Genesis 32:28*). The man blessed Jacob there. Jacob realized he had been wrestling with God, and he named the place Peniel, which means "face of God," because he had seen God and lived (*Genesis 32:30*). From that day on, Jacob walked with a limp—a reminder that God had changed him.

The next day, Jacob went to meet Esau. He bowed low as he approached his brother, expecting anger. But instead of attacking him, Esau ran to Jacob, threw his arms around him, and hugged him. The brothers wept together (*Genesis 33:4*). God had changed Esau's heart and brought peace between them.

Afterward, Esau returned home, and Jacob traveled on with his family. Eventually, Jacob settled in the land of Canaan and bought land there (*Genesis 33:18-20*). Later, God told Jacob to return to Bethel, where God had first appeared to him years before. There, Jacob built an altar and worshiped the Lord (*Genesis 35:1-7*). God appeared to Jacob again, repeated His promises, and reminded him that his new name was Israel (*Genesis 35:9-15*).

God changed Jacob and gave him a new name because his life had been transformed by meeting with God. In an even greater way, Jesus came so that we could be changed, too. Because of our sin, we are separated from God and deserve judgment. But Jesus died on the cross and rose again so our sins could be forgiven. Everyone who trusts in Jesus is welcomed into God's family forever and given a brand new life in Him *(2 Corinthians 5:17)*.

REBUILD THE STORY



1. After many years away, where did God tell Jacob to go, and why was Jacob afraid to return? *(Genesis 31:3; 32:3-8)*
2. What did Jacob do when he heard Esau was coming with 400 men? *(Genesis 32:7-8)*
3. How did Jacob pray to God before meeting Esau? What did he ask God to do? *(Genesis 32:9-12)*
4. What happened to Jacob during the night when he was alone? *(Genesis 32:22-24)*
5. What did Jacob say when the man told him to let go? *(Genesis 32:26)*
6. What new name did God give Jacob, and what did that name mean? *(Genesis 32:27-28)*
7. How did Esau respond when he finally saw Jacob? *(Genesis 33:1-4)*
8. Where did God tell Jacob to go afterward, and how did Jacob worship God there? *(Genesis 35:1-15)*

9. Why do you think God allowed Jacob to wrestle with Him before meeting Esau? What was God teaching Jacob?

10. How did Jacob act differently toward Esau in this story compared to how he acted when he was younger? What does that show about his heart?

11. Why is it important that God changed Jacob's name after wrestling with him? What does a new name show about Jacob's new identity?

12. After God protected and changed Jacob, Jacob worshiped Him at Bethel. Why should remembering God's faithfulness lead us to worship and obey Him?

GOSPEL EMPHASIS

Though Jacob's life was marked by deceit, fear, broken relationships, and constant striving, God faithfully protected him and continued accomplishing His plan through him. Even when others tricked Jacob—and even when Jacob himself failed—God's covenant promises did not fail. God changed Jacob's heart, gave him a new identity, reconciled him with Esau, and preserved the family through whom His promises would continue. From Jacob's son Judah would one day come Jesus Christ, the promised Savior of the world. Just as God transformed Jacob from a deceiver into Israel, Jesus transforms sinners who trust in Him. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus provides forgiveness for our sin, gives us a new identity, and welcomes us into God's family forever. Jacob's story reminds us that God's plans cannot be stopped by human sin or weakness—and that His grace can change even the most broken people.



WHAT DOES THIS PASSAGE TEACH US ABOUT GOD?

Use your Attributes of God poster as a guide.

PRAYER PROMPTS

God, thank You for Your hand of protection and blessing in Jacob's life. Even amid deception, trickery, and constant struggles with others, You provided for and sustained Jacob and his family. Please help us to recognize Your hand in our lives just as Jacob did.



THIS WEEK'S BIBLE READING

Genesis 36-38