Jacob goes back to his homeland

We read from the Bible (ERV):

Genesis 31: 1-3 and 17-18

Genesis 32: 1-13 and 23-31

Genesis 33: 1-9

Genesis 35: 9-20 and 27-29

Genesis 31

Time to Leave—Jacob Runs Away
1One day Jacob heard Laban’s sons talking. They said, “Jacob has taken everything that our father owned. He has become rich—and he has taken all this wealth from our father.” 2Then Jacob noticed that Laban was not as friendly as he had been in the past. 3The Lord said to Jacob, “Go back to your own land where your ancestors lived. I will be with you.”

17So Jacob prepared for the trip. He put his children and his wives on camels. 18Then they began traveling back to the land of Canaan, where his father lived. All the flocks of animals that Jacob owned walked ahead of them. He carried everything with him that he had gotten while he lived in Paddan Aram.

Genesis 32

Jacob Prepares to Meet Esau
1Jacob also left that place. While he was traveling, he saw God’s angels. 2When he saw them, he said, “This is God’s camp!” So Jacob named that place Mahanaim.
3Jacob’s brother Esau was living in the area called Seir in the hill country of Edom. Jacob sent messengers to Esau. 4He told them, “Tell this to my master Esau: ‘Your servant Jacob says, I have lived with Laban all these years. 5I have many cattle, donkeys, flocks, and servants. Sir, I am sending you this message to ask you to accept us.’”
6The messengers came back to Jacob and said, “We went to your brother Esau. He is coming to meet you. He has 400 men with him.”
7Jacob was very frightened and worried. He divided the people who were with him and all the flocks, herds, and camels into two groups. 8Jacob thought, “If Esau comes and destroys one group, the other group can run away and be saved.”
9Then Jacob said, “God of my father Abraham! God of my father Isaac! Lord, you told me to come back to my country and to my family. You said that you would do good to me. 10You have been very kind to me. You did many good things for me. The first time I traveled across the Jordan River, I owned nothing—only my walking stick. But now I own enough things to have two full groups. 11I ask you to please save me from my brother Esau. I am afraid that he will come and kill us all, even the mothers with the children. 12Lord, you said to me, ‘I will be good to you. I will increase your family and make your children as many as the sands of the sea. There will be too many to count.’”
13Jacob stayed in that place for the night. He prepared some things to give to Esau as a gift.

23After he sent his family across the river, he sent across everything he had.
The Fight With God
24Jacob was left alone, and a man came and wrestled with him. The man fought with him until the sun came up. 25When the man saw that he could not defeat Jacob, he touched Jacob’s leg and put it out of joint.
26Then the man said to Jacob, “Let me go. The sun is coming up.”
But Jacob said, “I will not let you go. You must bless me.”
27And the man said to him, “What is your name?”
And Jacob said, “My name is Jacob.”
28Then the man said, “Your name will not be Jacob. Your name will now be Israel. I give you this name because you have fought with God and with men, and you have won.”
29Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.”
But the man said, “Why do you ask my name?” Then the man blessed Jacob at that place.
30So Jacob named that place Peniel. He said, “At this place, I saw God face to face, but my life was spared.” 31Then the sun came up as Jacob left Peniel. He was limping because of his leg.

Genesis 33

Jacob Meets Esau
1Jacob looked and saw Esau coming with 400 men. Jacob divided his family into four groups. Leah and her children were in one group, Rachel and Joseph were in one group, and the two maids and their children were in two groups. 2Jacob put the maids with their children first. Then he put Leah and her children behind them, and he put Rachel and Joseph in the last place.
3Jacob himself went out before them. While he was walking toward his brother Esau, he bowed down to the ground seven times.
4When Esau saw Jacob, he ran to meet him. He put his arms around Jacob, hugged his neck, and kissed him. Then they both cried. 5Esau looked up and saw the women and children. He said, “Who are all these people with you?”
Jacob answered, “These are the children that God gave me. God has been good to me.”
6Then the two maids and the children with them went to Esau. They bowed down before him. 7Then Leah and the children with her went to Esau and bowed down. And then Rachel and Joseph went to him and bowed down.
8Esau said, “Who were all those people I saw while I was coming here? And what were all those animals for?”
Jacob answered, “These are my gifts to you so that you might accept me.”
9But Esau said, “You don’t have to give me gifts, brother. I have enough for myself.”

Genesis 35

Jacob’s New Name
9When Jacob came back from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again. God blessed Jacob 10and said to him, “Your name is Jacob, but I will change that name. You will no longer be called Jacob. Your new name will be Israel.” So God named him Israel.
11God said to him, “I am God All-Powerful, and I give you this blessing: Have many children and grow into a great nation. Other nations and other kings will come out of you. 12I gave Abraham and Isaac some special land. Now I give the land to you and to all your people who will live after you.” 13Then God left that place. 14-15Jacob set up a memorial stone there. He made the rock holy by pouring wine and oil on it. This was a special place because God spoke to Jacob there, and Jacob named the place Bethel.
Rachel Dies Giving Birth
16Jacob and his group left Bethel. Before they came to Ephrath, Rachel began giving birth to her baby. 17She was having a lot of trouble with this birth. She was in great pain. When her nurse saw this, she said, “Don’t be afraid, Rachel. You are giving birth to another son.”
18Rachel died while giving birth to the son. Before dying, she named the boy Benoni. But Jacob called him Benjamin.
19Rachel was buried on the road to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). 20Jacob put a special rock on Rachel’s grave to honor her. That special rock is still there today.

27Jacob went to his father Isaac at Mamre in Kiriath Arba (Hebron). This is where Abraham and Isaac had lived. 28Isaac lived 180 years. 29Then Isaac became weak and died and went to be with his people. He had lived a long and full life. His sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

For 20 years Jacob has lived with his uncle Laban in Haran but he longs for his homeland: will his parents still be alive? And would Esau still be angry with him for deceiving him so ugly? Then Jacob hears the voice of the Lord saying to him, “go back now to your family and the land where you were born, I will be with you.”

Jacob discusses it with his wives. They say, “We don't want to stay at home with our father. He has not treated us well, do what God has said to you.

Jacob, with everyone who belongs to him, leaves without telling Laban. When he finds out that Jacob and his family left, he becomes furious and travels after him, but God protects Jacob, and in a dream the Lord says to Laban, “remember not to harm Jacob.”

When they meet they give words to their annoyance but they settle the argument again and build an altar together. Then they hold a feast. Laban says goodbye to his daughters and grandchildren and returns home.

Jacob travels on and on the way he suddenly sees a group of angels in front of him. He cries out, “This is an army of God!” and he calls the place Machanaim. It reminds him of Bethel where 20 years ago at the start of his journey he saw in a dream a ladder along which angels climbed up and down. Again, God shows Jacob that he does not have to make this journey alone: God goes with him and He provides safety and protection.

Meanwhile, Jacob thinks about the meeting he is going to have with his brother. He sends men with the gift ahead to gauge Esau's reaction When the men return they say, “we have been with your brother Esau he is coming with 400 men.”

Jacob is greatly startled and he divides all the people and animals who are with him into two camps. He says, “if Esau attacks one camp the other camp can flee.” Then he goes into prayer and begs for the Lord to save him and his family.

He spends the night at the place Machanaim. Here in the place where he has seen angels he wants to be. Here he feels close to God.

In the middle of the night he takes his family across the river Jabbok. He himself stays behind and gets into a fight with a stranger. When no one wins the fight, the stranger touches Jacob's hip. This causes Jacob to limp for the rest of his life. The stranger finally blesses Jacob and says, “you have fought with God and with men and you have won, from now on your name is no longer Jacob but Israel. Jacob spent his life struggling with others but God blesses him. The God of his father Isaac and of his grandfather Abraham has also become his God. The encounter with God fills him with awe. And what an encouragement now that he is about to build a new life in the land where he has not been for 20 years.

Jacob is now, like his father and grandfather, “patriarch. From them is born the chosen nation of Israel.

The twelve tribes of Israel are born of the twelve sons of Jacob. They are the “founding fathers” of Israel.

When morning comes, Jacob sees Esau coming. He goes before his wives and children and bows to his brother: again and again. But Esau rushes to meet him, embraces him, falls around his neck and they weep.

What a reunion! Esau's anger toward Jacob is totally gone. Jacob introduces his family and they agree that Jacob will soon come to Seir where Esau lives but first Jacob sets up an altar in Shechem. Then he travels on to Bethel and fulfills his promise made on his outward journey (Genesis 28:20-22). Here at Bethel, God appears to him again and blesses him and his children.

As they travel on, Rachel dies giving birth to her second son Benjamin. Joseph and Benjamin must grow up without a mother. Jacob must go on without his beloved wife. He travels to his father Isaac. His father is still alive! Not long after, Isaac dies, having reached 180 years of age. His sons Jacob and Esau bury him In the cave of Machpelah where Abraham, Sarah and mother Rebekah are also buried.

Jacob is home again and here he builds an existence with his wives and children.

***Prayer: “Lord, we were allowed to hear of the life of Jacob who struggled throughout his life with people and also with You. Jacob, who deceived his father and brother so ugly. You did not say, “I want nothing more to do with you.” No, You also want to be his God. You are a God who forgives and loves people. You also want to be my God. Lord, You are still the same God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the God what me. What a miracle. What grace. What love. Thank You Lord.***

Questions:

- In what ways did Jacob “wrestle” with the people around him?

And in what ways did Jacob “struggle” with God?

Is there anything or anyone you struggle with?

- In a short time, Jacob experiences a lot from God: he hears God's voice/ he sees angels/ he fights with a stranger after which the stranger blesses him.

Have you ever experienced something that you said (later): that was an encounter with God?

- Jacob spends the night in the place where he has seen angels. Here he feels close to God.

Do you have a place where you feel close to God?

- The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob wants to be your God too. Do you believe that? And what does that mean, that He wants to be your God?

- Jacob looks forward to seeing his brother Esau again. But the reunion is joyous. Have you ever really looked forward to something that was not so bad?

- Why did Esau forgive Jacob?

Did Jacob's prayer influence this?

A supplement to this Bible study for beginners is the September 2024 Bible study on Leah.

You can also find this Bible study at [www.febebijbelstudies.nl](http://www.febebijbelstudies.nl)

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