

The image shows a church building with a steeple, palm trees, and a paved area. Overlaid on the image is the text "Starlight Adult SS Lesson Genesis 32-36" in a stylized, bold font with a red outline and drop shadow.

Starlight Adult SS Lesson Genesis 32-36

These chapters record several crucial experiences in Jacob's life as he made his way from Laban's house to Bethel. They give us three vivid pictures of this man who illustrates for us the conflict between the flesh & the Spirit, the old life & the new.

I. Jacob the Wrestler (32)

Esau was coming & Jacob was about to meet up with his forgotten past. Would Esau forgive him or fight him? Would Jacob lose everything he had schemed to acquire? How tragic it is when the past catches up with sinners. Geography could not erase Jacob's past nor could twenty years of history change it. But before Jacob met Esau, he experienced three other meetings:

A. He met God's angels (vv. 1-20).

He had first seen these angels at Bethel (chap. 28), & they should have been a reminder to Jacob that God was in control. He named the place "the two camps" (his own camp & the camp or army of angels), but he failed to put his faith in God who had promised years before to protect him. Believers today may claim Heb. 1:14 & Ps. 91:11-13 as they are walking in the will of God. Alas, Jacob started trusting himself & his own schemes again! He tried to appease Esau with gifts. He divided his company into two bands (v. 7) & ignored the protecting army of angels. Then, after taking these steps in carnal confidence, he asked for God's help! Had he forgotten the way God had protected him from Laban? (31:24)

B. He met the Lord (vv. 21-26).

It is when we get alone with God that good things begin to happen. Christ came to wrestle with Jacob, & the struggle lasted all night. Keep in mind that Jacob was not wrestling to get a blessing from God; rather, he was defending himself & refusing to yield. The Lord wanted to break Jacob & bring him to the place where he would honestly say, "Not I, but Christ" (Gal. 2:20). All night long, Jacob defended himself & refused to surrender or even admit that he had sinned. Then God weakened Jacob, & the wrestler could only cling!

Now instead of scheming for a blessing or bargaining for a blessing, he asked God for the blessing—and he received it.

C. He met himself (vv. 27-32).

We don't truly see ourselves until first we see the Lord. "What is your name?" (v. 27) was the question that forced Jacob to confess his true self—"Jacob, the schemer."

Once he faced himself & confessed his sin, Jacob could be changed. God gave him a new name—"Israel, prince with God" or "a God-governed man". The way to have power with God is to be broken by God. God also gave him a new beginning & a new power as he began "walking in the Spirit" & not in the flesh. This was illustrated by a new walk, for now Jacob limped. He had been broken by God, but his limp was a mark of power & not weakness. Verse 31 indicates the dawning of a new day, as the sun rose & Jacob limped out to meet Esau—with God's help!

II. Jacob the Backslider (33)

It would have been wonderful had Jacob lived up to his new name & new position with God, but he did not. The chapter begins with "Jacob" the old name, not "Israel" the new name, & we see him "lifting up his eyes"—walking by sight, not by faith. See what Jacob lost because he did not claim his spiritual privileges:

A. His limp (33:3). He bowed before Esau instead of walking (limping) & faced him man-to-man. It is always tragic when a "prince with God" cringes before a man of the world! Better to limp by faith than to bow in self-trust.

B. His power (33:1-2, 8-11). See Jacob scheming again, bargaining with the enemy. Did God not assure him of His power? Had God not promised to see him through?

C. His testimony (33:12-17). Jacob lied to Esau & traveled in the opposite direction. The two never did meet until they buried their father (35:29). No doubt, at that meeting, Esau asked Jacob what had happened to him after they parted.

D. His vision (33:17-19). He moved again & pitched his tent toward the city of Shechem, not unlike Lot (13:12). He lost the vision of God's city (Heb. 11:13-16).

F. His daughter (34). Like Lot, Jacob put his family in a place of temptation. When his daughter investigated the city, she was violated. Sadly, Jacob's sons were liars like their father. In fact, they used the sacred rite of circumcision to accomplish their wicked scheme.

Vss 30-31 suggest that Jacob was selfishly more concerned with his own safety & welfare than he was with the sins of his family. When did all of this begin? When Jacob failed to live up to his new standing with God. Why do NT Christians today scheme & sin & fail? Because they fail to live up to their heavenly position in Christ (Eph. 4:1ff).

III. Jacob the Traveler (35-36)

Note how often Jacob "journeyed" in these chapters (35:5, 16, 21). God had called him to go "back to Bethel" (v. 1), back to the place of the vision & the vow. When a person is backslidden (as Jacob was), there is nothing else for him to do but go back to the place of dedication & renew his vows. Before he could take his company back to the altar, Jacob had to clean house of the strange gods & the jewelry associated with heathen worship had to be buried. The only place for sin is in the grave. In fact, there are four graves in this chapter: the grave of the idols (v. 4), Deborah's grave (v. 8), Rachel's grave (v. 19), & Isaac's grave (v. 29).

Jacob returned to Bethel & built an altar. God met him in a new way & reminded him of his new name, Israel. God reaffirmed the promises He gave to Abraham & Isaac. Jacob responded by erecting a new pillar & anointing it, as he had done years before. A backslidden believer does not need a new experience to get right with God. He needs only to reaffirm the old experience again. How strange that Rachel should die soon after Jacob is restored to fellowship with God. Great spiritual experiences are not security against the sorrows & trials of life. Certainly Jacob was better able to bear this sorrow now that he had again built his altar. Everything that Jacob had lost before had been regained because he had met God at the altar.

Not only are there sorrows in the family of the dedicated believer, but there are also sins (v. 22). Reuben was born amid great expectations (29:32), & Jacob said in later years that Reuben could have accomplished much (49:3). But Reuben was unstable; he lacked godly character (49:4); & as a consequence, he lost the birthright that belonged to the firstborn son (1 Chron 5:1-2) to Judah & Joseph. Sin never brings blessing; it is always costly.

The final act on this journey was for Jacob & Esau to bury their father. Jacob had planned to see his mother again, but she died before he arrived home. Chapter 36 gives the history of Esau, for God did make him a mighty nation. Unfortunately, the Edomites were the enemies of God's people for centuries. *****

APPLICATIONS

Fear Jacob feared for his & his families' lives. He remembered his sin. Deep down he realized what he would have done if the "shoe was on the other foot." Many of us live our lives in fear in our daily lives because of our past sins. Many of us have been frozen by our past sins against someone or even more so, a past sin someone has committed against us. Jacob was preparing for the worst. How often do we do the same thing?

Forgiven Jacob sees 400 men & puts his plan into action. He knew it He & His family were going to be destroyed. However, after all of that worrying, Esau ran to meet Jacob. Esau did not hate Jacob; instead he embraced Jacob & the two brothers wept for joy.

Esau did the opposite thing from which most of us would do. In fact, Esau did what God does. God wants His children to come home. God does not allow the past to prevent us from returning to Him. He runs to meet us & then welcomes us home. We are to be forgiving of others in the same way that God is to us.

Forgotten Now here is the most difficult, un-human part of forgiveness. Not only must we forgive, but we are to forget. I know you are saying to yourself, "I cannot do that," but forgetting is part of forgiveness? If you keep bringing it up again & again as a weapon, did you really forgive that person?

Esau did not bring up the past. Even Christians need to get their relationships right in order to have peace. That means we must not just ask for forgiveness, but we must also forgive & learn to forget & never bring up past mistakes again.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

*How do we act when someone does us wrong?

*Do we want take revenge on others?

*Do we worry about past mistakes rather than asking God to forgive us & restore relationships with those individuals we have hurt?

*Are we guilty of making the statement, "I will forgive them but I cannot forget what they did?"

Is it possible to forgive without forgetting? We all have relationship problems at one time or another. When that happens, we need to go to the person & make things right.

If you have been wronged by someone, forgive them. If you have wronged someone else, ask them to forgive you. It is what God expects of us. (Matt 18)***