

JACOB'S PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE



FOCUS VERSE

Genesis 32:11

Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children.

LESSON TEXT

Genesis 28:16–22

16 And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not.

17 And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

18 And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it.

19 And he called the name of that place Beth-el: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first.

20 And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on,

21 So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God:

22 And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.

Genesis 32:9–12

9 And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee:

10 I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.

11 Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children.

12 And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.



FOCUS THOUGHT

One of the blessings of difficult situations in our lives is that it causes us to call out to God.



CULTURE CONNECTION

The Best Thing We Can Do Is Pray

Have you ever prayed about a difficult situation because your back was against the wall? Did you wait until it seemed the situation was desperate and all hope was gone? And then, as a last resort, you prayed.

In the summer of 2015, a breach of security allowed hackers identifying themselves as “The Impact Team” to access the database of Ashley Madison. The hackers released twenty-five gigabytes of secret and personal details of millions who joined the matchmaking service. Many high-profile people were among the millions of users whose personal account information was made public.

Sometimes in these desperate conditions we confess to others, “Well, there’s really nothing we can do but pray.” Is that not the best thing to do? Should not prayer be our first action instead of our last resort?

Talking about prayer being a last resort,

author, pastor, and speaker Greg Laurie observed, “After we’ve tried everything else, we’ll finally say, ‘Well, I guess all I can do is pray.’” For the Jerusalem church, however, it was their first resort in a time of crisis. They freely acknowledged the power of prayer to accomplish that which they could never accomplish on their own” (“Prayer: Your First [or Last] Resort, www.wnd.com, accessed July 11, 2016).

Laurie was writing about the response of the Jerusalem church following Peter’s arrest. The church called a prayer meeting about the matter, and while they were still praying, Peter came knocking on the door. His appearance shocked Rhoda who answered the door—and indeed, all who were at the prayer meeting. (See Acts 12.)

When facing difficult times, let us begin praying early with faith in God, never waiting until we are desperate.

OUTLINE

I. JACOB’S BLESSING

- A. Isaac Blessed Jacob
- B. Jacob Fled for His Life
- C. God Appeared to Jacob in a Dream
- D. The Lord Confirmed the Abrahamic Covenant
- E. God Assured Jacob of His Continued Presence

II. JACOB’S COMMITMENT

- A. He Desired God’s Presence, Protection, and Provision
- B. He Made a Commitment to God

III. JACOB’S PRAYER

- A. Jacob’s Difficulty Brought Him to a Place of Prayer
- B. Jacob Wrestled All Night and Was Blessed
- C. Persistence Resulted in Spiritual Progress

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

There is a curious thing about names during Old Testament times. Although it is hard to understand how it happened, names often characterized the individuals who bore them.

Perhaps observing such significance placed on names is curious to North Americans because often parents glibly select whatever names are popular at the time—driven by pop culture, fads, or hero figures of the day. Little if any thought is given to the meaning of the name.

In the Old Testament, however, evidently much thought, and possibly prayer, went into the selection of names for the children. It is hard to say exactly how the the names came to closely identify with the character and nature of the individuals so named. Perhaps the names became like self-fulfilling prophecies. Possibly the names tended to form the character of the individuals bearing them because they influenced how people viewed

and dealt with the individuals. Or maybe God's providential knowledge played a role in influencing parents to name their children with names that would coincide with the child's nature and character, which certainly was no secret to God. In any case, names often matched their recipients.

However the naming process worked in the Old Testament, there are few biblical characters whose names better matched their character and nature than did Jacob's name, which means "supplanter" or "deceiver." Jacob surely lived up to his name, for he was a conniver. He conspired with his mother, Rebekah, to deceive his father, Isaac, who then gave to Jacob the family blessing that was intended for his brother, Esau.

Jacob's deceitful ways eventually got him into extremely difficult circumstances. Although he never should have waited until getting into extreme circumstances to pray, his situation led him eventually into one of the most powerful prayer meetings for deliverance recorded in the Scriptures.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. JACOB'S BLESSING

That Jacob was blessed and favored by God was soon evident in his life. Who can fully understand the ways of God? His ways are far above our ways and His thoughts beyond our ability to think (Isaiah 55:8–9). But God in His foreknowledge saw Jacob in a light far above and beyond the carnal, deceptive ways of his youth, and God loved Him. (See Romans 9:13.) Time would not permit us to explore in this lesson the love God had for Jacob, but clearly God loved Jacob. God did not love, however, the way Jacob went about receiving the birthright—which he convinced Esau to give to him—or the blessing he tricked his father into giving to him.

A. Isaac Blessed Jacob

The struggle between Esau and Jacob began while they were yet in their mother's womb (Genesis 25:22–26). When Rebekah enquired of the Lord the reason for the struggle within her body, the Lord's answer to her was significantly revelatory, although she could not have understood its importance at the time.

"And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, And two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23).

God's prophetic answer to Rebekah revealed the ongoing struggle between Esau and Jacob to be one that would eventually reveal two separate nations and two levels of strength, with the younger brother being the stronger of the two. Jacob was destined to be the stronger brother and the one who would obtain great blessing. He did not have to resort to conniving and deceptive means to obtain blessing, but he was the supplanter. Jacob manipulated his family in order to obtain what he wanted.

Jacob first bargained with his brother over the birthright, which conveyed certain legal benefits for the possessor. Esau came in from the field famished from hunting and Jacob took advantage of his physical hunger. Jacob had prepared a pot of tasty soup, and Esau begged Jacob to share some with him. Recognizing his brother's weakness at the moment, Jacob offered to give him some in exchange for the birthright, and Esau opted for the temporary relief provided by a bowl of soup over the lasting benefits contained within the birthright. (See Genesis 25:29–34.)

Jacob, however, did not stop with his maneuvering and manipulation of Esau over the birthright. He also schemed with his mother over a plan to obtain the blessing his father was to bestow upon Esau. (See Genesis 27:1–41.) Jacob stole the blessing that rightfully belonged to Esau, and consequently Esau hated his brother and was determined to kill him.

"And he said, Thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing. . . . And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob" (Genesis 27:35;41).

B. Jacob Fled for His Life

Jacob did not stay to see if he could further manipulate Esau or assuage his anger. Jacob decided it was time to run away from his trouble.

Is it not amazing how quickly humans are to run from their troubles instead of facing and dealing with them? Like Jacob, many of our problems in life are of our own making. Still, instead of confronting our problems head on and resolving the issues at hand, we too often choose to try to escape them, which never solves the fundamental issue. If we are not careful, we will become like Jacob, constantly being on the run in a futile effort to avoid the consequences of our past mistakes.

In Jacob's case, he fled to his Uncle Laban (his mother's brother). Although running from his problem may not have been the best solution to the trouble, at least the problem with Esau did bring about a change in Jacob's thinking. That is what we call repentance—a change of mind and change of direction in one's life. Jacob had spent too long as a deceptive, conniving man. Now he was seeing the bitter harvest of the seeds of deceit. And the changes in his life were only beginning, for he soon would encounter God in a personal way before reaching Uncle Laban's place.

C. God Appeared to Jacob in a Dream

On the way to Padanaram, which is where Laban lived, Jacob encountered God. (See Genesis 28:12–15.) Jacob went to sleep and dreamed about a ladder from earth to Heaven with angels ascending and descending it. Above the ladder was God, who gave Jacob some great promises.

What a picture of the grace of God! Jacob did not deserve great promises from God, but that is what he received. Jacob's life demonstrated that our promises from God and relationship with God are not based upon our goodness or good works; they are based on the grace of God who loves us. God had great things in store for Jacob! Although Jacob's change of direction through repentance did not earn him the blessings of God, it did put him in a place where he was open to receive God's blessings. So it is for us today.

“And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not” (Genesis 28:16).

Jacob was profoundly affected by his encounter with God. Consequently, he changed the name of the place from Luz to Bethel, which means “house of God.”

D. The Lord Confirmed the Abrahamic Covenant

During Jacob's encounter with God through his dream, God confirmed the Abrahamic Covenant with him, for his was to be the lineage through which God would fulfill His covenant. This was evidence of God's blessing upon Jacob's life. Going all the way back to Rebekah's carrying of Jacob and Esau in her womb when she enquired of God about the struggle within her, God had promised the elder would serve the younger and that they would represent two distinct nations of people. The people who were destined to be God's people—the ones through whom the promises of God would be fulfilled—would flow forth through the descendants of Jacob. God had chosen Jacob to be the one of blessing through whom He would enact His covenant, which began with Abraham.

E. God Assured Jacob of His Continued Presence

God also assured Jacob at Bethel that He would abide with him. There is no greater promise to people of faith than the abiding presence of God!

“And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of” (Genesis 28:15).

“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever” (John 14:16).

Jacob had not yet reached the pinnacle of his changing experience with God, but God had met with him, renewed with him a holy covenant, and promised to abide with him

forever. Jacob had turned around, and he was now headed down a pathway of life that would bring to him blessing, change, and the presence of God. Further, this change of direction moved him to make a commitment to God that abandoned his former position of self-serving, selfish deception and grasping for that which belonged to others.

II. JACOB'S COMMITMENT

A. He Desired God's Presence, Protection, and Provision

Jacob desired the same things all believers long for—God's presence, protection, and provision (Genesis 28:20). How we need the abiding presence of God in our lives! We do not understand what things we need as we journey through this life, but we know God understands. We need His guidance and direction through every season of our lives. He knows what we need before we ask Him, and He will direct our paths if we will trust and follow Him.

We need not only God's presence in our lives but also His protection. He is the One who is able to keep us safe and secure in all our ways. While we may not be able to avoid every painful and difficult circumstance of life, we can rest assured of God's presence and protection through times of pain and trouble. For example, Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth of God's abiding assistance and power over temptation.

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Jacob also desired God's provision, which He has promised to people of faith. He will provide ways of escape from temptations so we are able to bear them. If we will seek first His kingdom, God will provide for our needs. (See Matthew 6:33–34; Luke 12:31–32; John 6:27.) That is not to suggest it is unnecessary for us to work or put forth effort to provide for ourselves; the Scriptures also teach us to

be responsible workers and providers for our families. However, it does reveal God's interest in our lives and His promises to be with us, protect us, and provide for us in many ways in which we are unable to provide for ourselves.

B. He Made a Commitment to God

Jacob did not just make a list of selfish desires known to God; he made a commitment of personal promises to God in response to God's renewed covenant through him and his lineage. (See Genesis 28:21–22.) Specifically, Jacob demonstrated his commitment to God through three actions.

Jacob pursued a close relationship with God. Jacob suddenly realized that God had been missing from his life up to that point. Jacob wanted a close relationship with God enough to pursue it. He was not content just to sit back and hope it would develop or suddenly appear. Jacob went after whatever was necessary in order to develop a close relationship with the Lord.

Jacob established a place of worship. As mentioned earlier, Jacob established at Luz a memorial and place of worship, and he recognized it as a sacred place of the presence of God.

Jacob committed his finances to God. Jacob promised God the tithe of all his increase. Of all God would give to Jacob, he promised to give the tenth part to God.

III. JACOB'S PRAYER

After his encounter with God at Bethel, Jacob went on to Padanaram. Interestingly, during the years he spent with Laban, Jacob reaped from the bitter harvest of the deceptions he had sown earlier in life. Jacob set his heart upon Rachel, the younger daughter of Laban, and he agreed to work seven years in exchange for the opportunity to marry her. However, after fulfilling his commitment and taking his bride to the marital tent, he discovered Laban had deceived him. Instead of Rachel, Laban had given Jacob her older sister, Leah. How anguished and disappointed Jacob was!

Consequently, Jacob agreed to work an additional seven years in exchange for Rachel, whom he received in addition to Leah.

Surely Jacob learned what it feels like to experience the sting of deception. However, God's blessing was still upon him, and it showed up in the productivity and quality of his herds—even to the point of provoking Laban's jealousy and anger. After twenty years of working for Laban, it was time for Jacob to move forward in his life once again. The Lord told him to return to his homeland. (See Genesis 31:3).

A. Jacob's Difficulty Brought Him to a Place of Prayer

As Jacob began his journey, he sent messengers ahead to let Esau know of his coming. When the messengers returned, they notified Jacob that Esau was coming to meet him and bringing four hundred men with him. Why is it with human nature that we often wait until we are in dire circumstances before we resort to prayer? Such was the case with Jacob. His life had been changed for the better, but he was still lacking in the depth of his relationship with God. Fearing that Esau was going to retaliate for Jacob's receiving the birthright and the blessing, Jacob was ready to get serious with God in prayer.

Jacob was in God's will. Jacob began his prayer by reminding God that he was journeying back to his homeland because God had directed him to do so. "And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee" (Genesis 32:9).

Jacob prayed with humility. Although Jacob had become wealthy during his time with Laban, Jacob took no credit for his achievements. He acknowledged that all his blessings had come from God. "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou has shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands" (Genesis 32:10).

Jacob prayed for deliverance. Remembering that twenty years ago Esau had threatened to kill him, Jacob feared that Esau might be coming to meet him to carry out that threat. Jacob openly expressed his fear to God and asked for deliverance from such a fate. "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand

of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children" (Genesis 32:11).

Jacob reminded God of His covenant promise. Jacob seemed to be encouraging himself in the Lord when he remembered God's covenant promise. "And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude" (Genesis 32:12).

The next morning Jacob sent some of his servants ahead bearing many gifts for Esau. He sent them in groups, one at a time, so there would be some time and distance between them, and instructed the servants as to what they should say to Esau. That night he sent his closest family members and all the rest of his possessions across the ford Jabbok, and he was left alone.

B. Jacob Wrestled All Night and Was Blessed

When Jacob was alone at Penuel (or Peniel, both variations meaning the same: "facing God"), there appeared "a man" who wrestled with Jacob all night. (See Genesis 32:24–29.) Other versions translate "a man" as "one" (Young's Literal Translation) or "a Man" (NKJV). Some believe the entity who wrestled with Jacob was an angel; others believe it was a theophany, a visible manifestation of God; others believe it was just a human. It is clear that whoever this entity was, Jacob indicated that he had come face to face with God (Genesis 32:30). Since God is a spirit and invisible, the context suggests it was a theophany or appearance or other (angelic) representative of God, an entity that enabled Jacob to face God directly.

Jacob was persistent. Throughout this night of wrestling Jacob demonstrated a quality he had exhibited from birth: persistence. Although in his early years he had used his persistence for less than noble purposes through the use of deceit, now he demonstrated the quality of his persistence in his pursuit of God. He was determined not to let go of the one with whom he wrestled without first receiving a blessing.

Jacob's name was changed to Israel. Because Jacob refused to let go without a blessing (Genesis 32:26), he ultimately prevailed and

received a name change. The one with whom Jacob wrestled changed his name from Jacob (supplanter) to Israel (God prevails). What a dramatic and powerful change! No longer would he be known as a deceiver but as one who had discovered and encountered the prevailing power of the Almighty.

Jacob found power with God. In addition to his significant name change, Jacob received power “with God and with men” (Genesis 32:28).

“He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God: Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Beth-el, and there he spake with us” (Hosea 12:3–4).

Jacob walked away from his encounter with God having persisted and prevailed, and having received a new name and new power both with his fellow man and with God. There is power in persistent, prevailing prayer.

C. Persistence Resulted in Spiritual Progress

Jacob’s pursuit of God through repentance, which included a changed lifestyle, and prayer paid off. Through his changed behaviors he positioned himself to receive God’s blessings. God’s blessings extended toward us are given only by grace, not on the basis of our merits. However, unless we position ourselves to receive them, they do us absolutely no good. Jacob began receiving the blessings God had designed for him because he became open to them and ready to receive them.

Jacob continued to pursue God and grow in his relationship with God. Although it was the fear of his brother, Esau, that drove him to pray at Penuel, he persisted in prayer there, wrestling with the angel of the Lord throughout the night. When all was settled the next morning, he had prevailed with God, had a new name, and had new power.

Jacob left that encounter to meet Esau. No longer was he constrained by the debilitating fear that had previously consumed him. He did not know how his brother would react to meeting him, but he had a new confidence in

God that sustained him and prepared him for the meeting. Consequently, Esau and Jacob were reunited and made much progress toward a restored relationship as brothers.

Going forward, Jacob continued growing in relationship with God. He built an altar to God in Shechem. He called this altar “El-elohe-Israel,” which means “the mighty God of Israel” (Genesis 33:20). We continue to see Jacob building altars to God for he had a new relationship with God. Then God sent Jacob back to Bethel where he was to erect another altar.

“And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother. Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: And let us arise, and go up to Beth-el; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went. . . . So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Beth-el, he and all the people that were with him. And he built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el: because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother” (Genesis 35:1–3;6-7).

Jacob obeyed the Lord and returned to Bethel where he erected an altar to God. Interestingly, Jacob once again renamed Luz, which he had previously renamed Bethel. Now he called the name of the place El-beth-el, meaning “God of the House of God.” This additional name change reflects Jacob’s growing relationship with God. When Jacob first renamed Luz as Bethel, he called it “the house of God”; when he called it El-bethel, he called it “God of the House of God.” In other words, when he first encountered the place, he recognized it as the house of God. But upon his return, he acknowledged the God of the house.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Human nature resists the idea and practice of prayer. Still, whenever an individual falls into difficult circumstances, that person often begins to cry out to God for help, or at least the individual is turning to acquaintances who are known to be connected to God through prayer. Life's troubles have a way of sending people to their knees in prayer.

Jacob discovered the need for prayer in his life. He repented from his former ways of deceit and began looking to God for deliverance and help when his brother Esau was determined to get even with him by destroying him. In his repentance and changed lifestyle, Jacob began to pursue God and

began growing in relationship with Him.

The lessons for believers today include at least four practical truths:

1. We should not wait until we are in desperate straits to seek God; we should seek God early.

2. Repentance and prayer form the foundation for spiritual growth in relationship with God as we pursue God in our lives.

3. Prayer can deliver us from life's many challenges and give us grace and strength to face our troubles, giving us power with God.

4. Prayer will enable us to become more fully acquainted with God. Then not only will we be familiar with the house of God, but also we will know the God of the house. ■

REFLECTIONS

- What lessons can we learn from Jacob's early life?
- Discuss how trouble turned Jacob's life around and caused him to pursue God.
- What is the significance of God's renewal of the Abrahamic Covenant with Jacob being appointed as the new conduit of the covenant?
- Discuss how the things Jacob desired of God—His presence, protection, and provision—reflect the basic desires of all believers.
- What is the significance of the two different names Jacob gave to Luz—Bethel and El-bethel?