

“Jacob was left alone.” This time it was his own choice. He needed to think about his twin brother coming to him with 400 men. His brother Esau, whom he, Jacob, had cheated. By deceiving their father Isaac into believing that Jacob was Esau, so that Isaac gave to Jacob the blessing, instead of to Esau, as Isaac had intended.

When had Jacob previously been all alone? 20 years before, when he had fled the wrath of Esau, soon after that deception, which in that culture had robbed Esau of his family inheritance and his first-born status. Jacob’s mother and father had told him to go north, to Paddam-Aram, where his uncle Laban lived, and find a wife there from his own family.

And what had happened on that journey, when Jacob was all alone? At a lonely place, at nightfall, he’d found a stone to act as a pillow, laid down and slept. **He had dreamt** and seen a vision of angels ascending and descending a great stairway, stretching from where he was, up to heaven. And beside him had stood God himself. And God didn’t say a word about Jacob’s cheating or seizing his own advantage.

What God did do was introduce himself as the LORD, the God of his grandfather Abraham, and of his father Isaac. God promised He would give Jacob and his children the land where he was now sleeping. His descendants would spread out and **bring blessing to all the people on earth.** And from now on, the LORD would be with Jacob wherever he went, and would bring him safely back to this land.

When Jacob woke, he realised what a great blessing he’d received. “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it. This is God’s house (Beth-El), the gate of heaven! “From now on, the LORD will be my God...” (Gen. 28:10-22)

And what had happened in those 20 years since? He’d arrived at his uncle’s as a penniless refugee. He’d fallen in love with Laban’s

younger daughter, Rachel, and worked for Laban seven years, as a bride price for her.

But Laban had taught him how bitter it was to be deceived; by Jacob finding, the morning after his wedding night, that **he’d been given the older sister, Leah,** and not Rachel! After a week, Jacob was given Rachel too, but he had to work another 7 years for her!

I don’t need to tell you the rest of what happened! Eventually, after he’d been cheated many times, his wives had agreed to go with him back to the Promised Land. **But now Jacob needed to face Esau.** Typically, he schemed how to appease his brother by sending him gifts in advance. He’d also prayed, but now he could do no more.

That night, when Jacob was all alone, a man wrestled with him till daybreak. Jacob was strong, and the man was not able to overpower him. So, he touched the hollow of Jacob’s hip and crippled him, so that, ever after, he would walk with a limp. I’m sure by this time, Jacob had realised he had been wrestling with no ordinary man! Even in this state, Jacob wouldn’t let his opponent go. “Bless me first”. (I think he wanted this man’s power to overcome Esau!)

The man replied, **“What is your name?”** “Jacob (which means *grabber or deceiver*)” At last, Jacob is being honest with God, and God has brought him to the end of himself and all his independent schemes of self-reliance.

“Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel. You have struggled, contended or had a contest, with God, and with men you have succeeded.” The name ‘Israel’ appears to mean, “God contends, has a contest”. We would like God to contend *for* us, but first He has a contest *with us all*, and He must win! The verb used here occurs only once more in all the OT (and that is in Hosea 12:3, when the prophet recalls Jacob’s struggle). Jacob had got *Isaac’s* blessing by cheating, by deceiving, but **he could only get God’s blessing by his complete surrender,** in total weakness!

What can we learn from this story?! What does God want to teach us!?

1. God knows all about us. We cannot deceive Him. Whether we're aware of it, or not, He has always been in our life, because He loves us and wants our response of love and trust.

2. God, in his love, pursues us until we are utterly honest with Him and acknowledge our need of Him, for He alone can save us.

3. God alone can bless us. He alone knows what is truly best for us, and we need to seek his directions for our life, and not just follow our own ideas.

Jacob sought God on his own terms, relying on his own self-interest – ***until he came to the end of his own way of doing things.*** The next day he met his brother, who warmly embraced and kissed him! ***What an answer to his prayer!*** Jacob was not yet a fully changed man, and he was not as honest with Esau as he might have been. In fact, Jacob was less than halfway through his entire life, and he had much to learn of God's grace and mercy. But Peniel was a turning point. ***Have we an experience like it, in our own life?***

There was once a young Englishman who had a real gift for writing poetry, but who didn't want God directing his life. When he had at last given place to God's love in his life, he told of God's pursuit in a poem that has proved a great blessing to many others. The poem began, "I fled Him, down the nights and down the days; I fled Him, down the arches of the years; ... From those strong Feet, that followed, followed after. But with unhurrying chase and unperturbed pace, Deliberate speed, majestic instancy, they beat – and a Voice beat More instant than the Feet ..."

Not many of us are poets, but we all need to be honest – to God – and to one another. We each have a Lover, we meet Him in Jesus, who is greater, more wonderful than any human lover, who alone can save us from the consequences of our sinful disobedience, who alone can truly bless us, directing our lives to what He knows is for our very best, and who will one day bring us to be with Him for ever!

Of course, ***we can reject His love***, still go our own way, and be quite alone with ourselves at the end, if that is our choice. But I believe you will be the loser, if you reject His love.

Amen.

Wrestling with God

Genesis 32:22-31

*I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go,
and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you.
(Gen. 28:15)*