

GOD CHANGED JACOB INTO ISRAEL

Genesis 32:1-35:29 and 46:1-49:33

Key Verse 35:10

"God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel." So he named him Israel."

Last Sunday we learned that Jacob's life was interesting. He fought for his own honor. He fought for his own love. He even fought for his wealth. Jacob lived differently than Esau. Jacob seemed to be much too ambitious and very self-centered. Yet God loved Jacob much more than Esau. Esau simply threw away God's promise to satisfy his desire for short-term pleasure and his lust for pagan women. Jacob, on the other hand, grabbed God's promise and made a small but clear life decision for it. God saw Jacob's simple childlike faith, even though he seemed to be quite self-centered. God walked with him and made him a large family with great wealth according to His promise. God help us also like Jacob to take hold on to God's promise with a small but clear life decision and experience God's wonderful protection and blessing.

Today we want to learn about the second part of Jacob's life of faith. Today we see that Jacob had fallen into some low points in his life and was overwhelmed full of fear and insecurity. At the low point of his life, he experienced that everything he had achieved with his own strength could not give him happiness, peace, way out and true support for his soul. He was very lonely. But God came to him, fought with him at the river of Jabbok, to give him the true blessing of God. God changed his name and called him Israel and gave him a new life, freeing Jacob from his ego domination and setting him up as a fighter for the promise of God. The river Jabbok was a historic place for Jacob. There

Jacob accepted God's reign and faithfully followed His guidance even in the midst of great disaster and pain to El-Bethel. Let us also come to the river of Jabbok, the river of true life, and receive God's true help and God's true blessing. God wants to help us and give us the true blessing. May God help us to take hold on to His true blessing and be used as the source of blessing for this generation until the end of the earth.

I. The God of Peniel (Ch. 32 and 33)

Let us read 32:3 " Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom." Because of his secret escape from Mesopotamia, Jacob's uncle Laban was very angry. However, God protected Jacob from Laban's revenge. Jacob, through the help of God, was allowed to make a peace treaty with Laban (Genesis 31:48-54). When Jacob had gotten his serious relationship problem with Laban solved, a much bigger problem lay before Jacob: the upcoming meeting with Esau. Their relationship had been very seriously broken since Jacob had taken away the firstborn blessing before Esau. Esau was bent on revenge and wanted to kill Jacob. When the messengers he sent to Esau returned with the news that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men, Jacob became anxious and overcome with the fear of death. He imagined the most horrible scenarios about Esau's possible revenge (32:8, 11).

Since Jacob made a decision for the promise when he moved out from his parents, at Bethel, God had always been with him until now. Jacob had achieved all that could be desired. Jacob was different from Esau, who only gave free reign to his desires according to his mood. Jacob was very ambitious and appreciated the firstborn blessing and the resulting prestige, which he was ultimately able to attain. Second, Jacob fought for love, and he also received love from his wives. Third, he pursued material wealth. Through his creative methods, he became very rich. He had achieved everything he desired. Jacob fought so hard and purposefully against Esau and also fought against Laban for himself. He had always won and achieved what his goals were. So great was his human blessing, but he still could not achieve happiness. Facing this life crisis from his relationship problem, he was rather again consumed by fear of death. The fear of death and uncertainty of his life made his heart cramp painfully again and again.

But Jacob was Jacob. He did not remain helpless. Jacob wanted to win this battle, too. Therefore, he thought of several strategies: First, damage control. Jacob divided his camp into two halves. This would allow one camp to survive when the other one was destroyed by Esau (32:7,8). Second, emergency prayers. Jacob was hoping that God would save him. But as the fear of death overwhelmed his confidence, he came to God and reminded God that He would protect him after all (32:10-12). Third, tactical-diplomatic gifts. Jacob wanted to reconcile Esau with 580 head of cattle divided among three herds (13-18). Fourth, He stayed behind alone on the other bank of the river Jabbok. He was so gripped by mortal fear for his own life that he even brought his own family across the river, wanting to have his own life spared through them, but remained alone himself (32:22-24a).

Jacob was like a man hanging in the middle of a rope suspended between two mountains, desperately trying to hold on to it with his hands in order to survive, just like the

philosophers of existentialism describe. "I struggle, therefore I am." He fought hard with Esau, with Laban, and even wanted to fight with God. But he did not know why he existed. So he kept struggling with his own strength to find a reason for his existence and to lay its foundation, whatever it might be.

Let's look at verses 22-24: "That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak." That night a man came to Jacob and wrestled with him. This man was God himself. It was a furious struggle. Jacob was allowed to admit his weakness, at least to God, and to throw off his ego. But Jacob didn't want to. Jacob did not want to be wrestled down. They fought all night long. Jacob's will and his philosophy of life, not to lose, was so strong that God finally had to touch the socket of Jacob's hip to break Jacob's resistance. Through this, Jacob realized who he was. God asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "Jacob" (32:27). "Jacob" had been just a weak, proud, ultimately selfish man. He struggled to survive without God and always thought he could and should win everything. He wanted all the blessings for himself with his own strength. He even tried to control God. "Jacob" in this spiritual state could neither meet Esau with joy nor live as a blessing to his parents, his children and his neighbors, not to mention being a father of many nations.

But when Jacob was finally defeated by God and came to God honestly with his sin, Jacob was changed 180 degrees. Jacob wept and asked God (Hosea 12:4, 5), "I will not let you go unless you bless me." Jacob had been defeated by God and was completely broken. He begged with pleading for God's blessing. How did God respond? Let's read verse 28 together, "Then the man said, 'Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.'" When

Jacob came to God with a repentant heart and pleaded for God's blessing, God had mercy on Jacob. He gave Jacob a new life. Jacob was now to be no longer "Jacob" who kept fighting for himself alone with his ego, seeking his own goal. Jacob's new name was to be "Israel." Israel literally means "God triumphs" and "God rules." God gave Jacob a completely new identity as Israel. This was the true blessing he had received from God. No longer would his ego and pride rule in him, but God alone. God will dwell and reign in him. Jacob has become a new creature "Israel"; a fighter for the blessing and promise of God alone and a father of many nations.

Let's look at verse 30. Jacob called this place Peniel. Because he realized that he should have died because he had seen God's face; but he gave thanks to God who had saved his life. As Jacob passed by Peniel, he realized something (32:31). Although he now limped, he had God's peace and a firm confidence in God's guidance and help in his heart. Jacob stood at the very front of his company to meet Esau (33:3). All situations hardly changed, but Jacob, accepting God's blessing, of his new life identity "Israel", was completely changed into a new creature; as a fighter and bearer of the promise. He was no longer fearful and uncertain, but could meet Esau in peace. Even he saw Esau's face as God's face, with love. He compelled Esau to accept his gift. This shows that he had found true bliss and understood what the true blessing is, which gives us true happiness and peace.

The spirit of the zeitgeist propagates that we could be happy and have peace if we achieve everything and possess everything we may have. "To have" or "to be?" What gives us true happiness? This has been the serious question of many philosophers. Many young people think as Jacob did and aspire to be able to struggle alone and achieve all human blessings, and also to be blessed, rich and loved. However, arduous struggles to establish our own will and affirm our ego will never make us happy.

How can we experience this God who gives us His true blessing? Having our ego broken is very painful for us humans. But without recognizing who we are and receiving His forgiveness, there is no tomorrow for Peniel. But whoever wrestles with God and accepts God's help, can find true happiness and peace, like Jakob and become a true victor. He who allows himself to be defeated by God and puts away his old name can receive God's forgiveness, above all God's true blessing. He will be reborn into a new creature as a true victor "Israel." He is free from all his lust, free from his pride, envy, hatred, above all free from the slavery of his ego in the new life. God has also already given us new life identity through repentance and faith in the Gospel of Jesus. We are free from all powers of sins and death. We got his promise and vision. Let us stand in the forefront of the testimony battle and disciple making ministry for the campus mission in Europe, as fighters of God's promise, like Israel. Let us stand as new creatures in the forefront of early morning prayer for spiritual revival in Europe and for world mission in this generation, like Martin Luther and Charles T. Studd.

Martin Luther struggled at first with his own righteousness to attain God's righteousness. He did so many good works, even devoting himself to the chaste life in the monastery, in order to become righteous before God. However, the more works he did, the more unhappy he became. However, as he wrestled with God during his study of the bible, he received Romans 1:17. He realized that neither his works nor his accomplishments could make him righteous, but that the righteous lives by faith alone. God broke his hip of self-righteousness by works. God made him one of the influential reformers, whom He used very precious for more than a thousand years as His instrument for the spiritual revival of Europe.

Charles T. Studd had everything one could wish for: He was very rich. He was an excellent student at Cambridge. He was good looking and a famous, respected elite cricketer. But it did not make him happy or

into a blessing. When his brother found himself on the brink of death, he asked himself, "Surely this can't be all there is in life?" Studd wrestled with God as he took up John 3:16 and Psalm 2:8: "Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession." That was when God blessed him. God gave him a new identity as a warrior of God for world missions with the "don't care a damn" spirit. Studd became a completely different man. Although he was confronted with many impossible misunderstandings and afflictions, he served the China, India and even Africa Mission without compromise. God made him a great fighter of the gospel and blessing to millions of people who stopped the advance of Islam in Africa.

Let us wrestle and fight with God for at least one whole night until we meet God personally and live as true, blessed victors. It is very good and very encouraging to see that every Sunday night our Next Gens are wrestling with the truth of God's word in a very personal way to receive the power of God's living word and live with their new spiritual identity under the reign of God.

II. The God of El-Bethel (Ch. 34 and 35; 46 - 49)

Jacob had made a vow to God when he fled from Esau. At this point, it would have been a good time to return to Bethel for the purpose of his vow. But instead, Jacob moved to Succoth and Shechem. There he bought land and built a house. Everything went well. His children were growing up. He had no more fear. He was very rich, and gained a lot of money out of the business with the Shechemites. He had completely forgotten God and his vows. But when he acted according to his own plan, some unexpected, shocking events happened.

First, Jacob's only daughter, Dinah, was raped by the son of the city ruler at Shechem, who then proposed marriage. Jacob wanted to solve this problem by marrying without making any noise. But his sons ruined his plan. They got the male Shechemites to be

circumcised. Simeon and Levi made a terrible massacre, and the other brothers plundered the whole city, including all the livestock. They treated women and children as prisoners of war. Jacob was horrified. But Jacob did not rebuke his sons for what they had done, or for bringing dishonor to God. Instead, he only worried about his own reputation and feared war with the Canaanites.

Jacob had once again reached a low point in his life. In this hopeless dead end in life, Jacob came to God again. Let's read chapter 35, verse 1 together, "Then God said to Jacob, "Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau."" God reminded Jacob of his vow. He told him to leave Shechem and move to Bethel. There he was to build an altar to God. Jacob had forgotten God. But God had not forgotten Jacob. God helped him again and again to return to his vow and to his promise.

This time Jacob turned back with all his heart. When he heard God's words, he commanded, "Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes. Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." (2b,3) Jacob obeyed God immediately. He decided to give up all his investments in Shechem and repent of his idolatry. He also helped his whole tribe to purify themselves from idols and obey God to move to Bethel. So they buried all the idols and all the earrings under a tree. Then they moved to Bethel. When they arrived at Bethel, Jacob built an altar to God there and called the place El-Bethel, which means "God of Bethel" or "God of the house of God."

In this passage, we learn the importance of remembering God, His work, and His grace. God keeps calling us back to our Bethel, where we received God's promise, through various incidents, especially through the devotion of our Bible teachers and shepherds.

Let us read verses 9 and 10 of chapter 35 together, "After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel." So he named him Israel." After God changed Jacob's name at the battle of the Jabbok, Jacob forgot his new name "Israel." In Shechem he continued to live as a "Jacob," namely as a businessman and politician. He took care of his own reputation again and affairs on his own and fought on his own. But Jacob, the businessman of Shechem, could not be a blessing and a father of many nations, but had to experience various disasters and human tragedies in his family. Thus, he had to come to his human limits again and kept getting into dead ends in life. But God is faithful. God's vision and promise were even greater than Jacob himself expected. God's vision and promise for Jacob were unchanging. God wanted to make Jacob a great nation and a father of many nations. God waited patiently for Jacob. At the moment of Jacob's defeat, God renewed his promise and identity again with his new name "Israel." Israel shows that he had become a fighter for the promise of God. He showed his greatness. He did not get stuck with his hand on the tree like a monkey, but he returned to God.

Let us read verse 11 together, "And God said to him, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will be among your descendants." Our true identity comes from God. Our true identity comes from God's promise to us. God's promise is the greatest blessing for us. It is the greatest blessing that He wants to make the Next Generation, starting from Dasom, the Ezekiel-, Josiah- and Gideonteam, David and Noah and Peter Kösters into blessing bearers and fathers and mothers of many nations, all the way to Cartagena, Cambodia, China and North Korea. It is our firm confidence that God will also use Germany and Europe again as an army of Bible teachers and as a continent

sending missionaries in a very precious way (Ezekiel 37:10).

Like Jacob, we make many mistakes in our life. Often we forget God and live only for our own selfish goal. Sometimes we experience the chastening of our own selfishness, as Jacob experienced in Shechem. But God is faithful. God raises us up and patiently carries us until we live by faith with His promise. What is our Bethel? What is God's promise to you? What is our life decision for the promise?

God is also the God of five baptized persons who used to be called "disobedience", "ego", "fun addiction" and "YouTube". Through the writing of their life testimonies and the prayer of their parents and God's servant with 1 Peter 4:13, they were able to meet God in their Bethel. Now they received new names "Sarah", "Sarah Grace", "Samuel Abraham", "Joshua" and "Peter Joseph". They are now living their new lives under God's dominion. God is using them in various ways as decisive workers in God's world mission ministry and wants to use them as global spiritual leaders for the spiritual revival of this generation. God's promise is that through them He will raise up numerous spiritual descendants and kings at 1700 universities in Germany and Europe, beginning in Bonn, Mannheim, Freiburg, Wuppertal and extending to the Muslim world.

The faithful God of Israel is also my God. I was caught in my strong ego. That is why I rebelled to live my own life with my own goals. Thanks be to God for the faithful prayer servanthood of God's servant and my parents. With Hebrews 5:8,9, they helped me to struggle with God. When I personally understood that Jesus obeyed God's counsel for His salvation work to the point of death on the cross to give me eternal salvation, I was allowed to confess my old name and be changed 180 degrees. Thanks be to God who gave me a completely new identity: "You shall be called Samuel Abraham!" It is God's greatest blessing for me to be used as a father of many nations and as a global spiritual leader for the revival

of Germany and Europe, according to Genesis 12:2 and 1. Samuel 3:19. God is the faithful God. He is training me by continually calling me back to my Bethel with Mark 15:34 and Matthew 1:23. Praise be to the Lord that through His wonderful love I may now live with God and with His promise as a father of many nations and one of the patriarchs of faith. With the servant of God I may work resolutely for the mission of the M-world through the online mission and for the mobilization of the Next Generation I may also pass on God's blessing to Dan, Friedrich and Peter Kösters, and witness God to them through John 21:15 and John 14:6. May God, according to His promise, open up 1700 universities and colleges in Europe and raise up Europe as a royal priesthood through our Next Generation.

Let us look at Jacob's last 17 years of life. Jacob became a very different man. Jacob was no longer a self-ruled or a self-fighting man. His name was Israel and he lived with the inwardness as a father of many nations, through whose descendants all nations on earth will be blessed. Whom did Jacob bless? Pharaoh was the most powerful man in the world at that time. Yet Jacob neither feared him to death nor tried to get anything from him. On the contrary, he even blessed Pharaoh and testified that life is a wandering to the kingdom of God. His hope was that his bones would not be buried in Egypt, but next to Isaac and Abraham, his forefathers. Jacob no longer placed his hope in earthly things. He placed it on his eternal home in the kingdom of heaven (Hebrews 11:15,16).

Jacob also blessed Joseph's sons: "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me and said to me, 'I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.'" (48:3) Joseph's sons grew up in Egyptian idolatry. But Jacob blessed them by faith because he wished them to become part of God's people.

After that, Jacob also blessed his own sons. He blessed each of them with a special blessing, according to God's will. Above all, he passed on the promise of the Messiah to his fourth son, Judah.

Today we have learned who the God of Israel is. The God of Israel is the God of Peniel and of El-Bethel, who wrestled with Jacob and called him back to his Bethel. Jacob wrestled with God. When he allowed himself to be defeated by God and repented of his sin problem, Jacob became "Israel".