



Jacob Wrestles with God

Genesis 32



LESSON GOAL

Students will learn that God hears the prayers of those who believe in Him.

BIBLE TRUTHS

- Jacob was afraid to meet his brother Esau.
- Jacob prayed to God for help.
- Jacob wrestled with God, seeing his need for God's blessing.
- God changed Jacob's name to Israel.

KEY VERSE

"And He said, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed'" (Genesis 32:28).

APPLICATION

- Do not fear man, but trust God.
- Confess your need for God.
- Rely on God's promises in prayer.

NEXT WEEK

God Preserves Joseph
Read Genesis 37.

Symbol Key



Craft



Finger Play



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Center



Activity



Q & A



Age Group

Teacher Planning Sheet

PREPARE

Objectives/Truths to cover this week

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Personal Application

As a result of my study in this passage, God wants me to

- _____
- _____
- _____

Three ways students need to apply this passage are

- _____
- _____
- _____

POINT

Choose from various ideas to point students to the coming Bible lesson.

- _____
- _____

PROCLAIM

Choose from various ideas to proclaim the Bible lesson.

Presentation Ideas

- _____
- _____

Praise/Music Ideas

- _____
- _____
- _____

PRACTICE

Choose ideas to help review and apply today's lesson.

- _____
- _____

Materials Needed

PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul.... You shall teach them to your children” (Deuteronomy 11:18–19).

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here to aid you in understanding the Scripture.

Bible Background

Many of us identify more readily with Jacob than with Abraham. With few deviations, Abraham’s faith in the Lord was unwavering; he continually worshiped God and followed His leading. Jacob’s faith, on the other hand, was distinctively human, marked by progress, plateaus, and setbacks. The Lord would use tragedy and desperation to prod him along, and surrounded by his enemies and filled with fear and doubt, Jacob would cry out to God.

Esau had hated Jacob for stealing both his birthright and the family blessing, and he decided to kill Jacob as soon as their father died. Rebekah and Jacob were afraid, and Rebekah said to Jacob, “You must leave us and go to Haran, where my relatives live. I will send word when it is safe to come home.” Jacob left home, sad and afraid. He walked and walked toward Haran. When it was night, he slept outside on the ground with the stars shining overhead.

Jacob had a dream one night, and in his dream, he saw a ladder going from earth into heaven. There were angels going up and down on the ladder. Above the ladder, the Lord God stood. The Lord said to Jacob, “I am the Lord God. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go.”

Jacob lived in the east for many, many years. He was married, had many children, and accumulated wealth. Eventually he decided to journey back to Canaan, where his father lived, but he was afraid to see Esau. He wondered whether Esau was still angry with him for lying and taking away the family blessing. Rebekah had promised to notify Jacob when Esau’s anger subsided, but she had not yet done so. Having no assurance that his brother’s wrath had diminished, Jacob was understandably nervous about the encounter. So, before he reached the area where Esau lived, Jacob sent messengers ahead to let Esau know that his intentions were peaceful. His actions acknowledged that his brother’s authority within Canaan had to be recognized before he re-inhabited it with his own family. Jacob assured Esau that he was not seeking charity, for he had oxen, donkeys, and other wealth. He even referred to Esau as “master” and to himself as Esau’s servant.

Jacob’s messengers returned with disheartening news: Esau was close at hand and had gathered a band of 400 men to accompany him. Jacob was “greatly afraid and distressed” (literally, “tightly pressed”). He may have feared that his father-in-law, Laban, was still pursuing him, and now also had run headlong into what seemed to be an even deadlier enemy. Preparing for the worst, Jacob divided his entourage into two smaller groups, a common practice among Eastern caravans in ancient times. This would accomplish at least two purposes: it would reduce the appearance of a massive invasion against which Esau would need to defend himself, and it would increase the probability that at least part of Jacob’s retinue would evade capture. Having done all he could to protect his family, Jacob realized that his situation still was hopeless. In desperation, he called out to God.

Additional Reference Materials

The MacArthur Study Bible by John MacArthur

Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis by John J. Davis

In his prayer, Jacob began by referencing his spiritual roots. He called on the God he had learned about from Abraham and Isaac. He invoked the name of Yahweh, the name used in relation to God's faithfulness in keeping His covenants. Jacob reminded the Lord that He had promised to be with him if he would return to Canaan (31:3). These were two elements of what Jacob knew about God from past experience. One might say that he was re-establishing an understanding of God's nature. And he was calling on the Lord to demonstrate His nature once again.

Jacob admitted his own unworthiness, confessing that he did not deserve the Lord's generosity. Like his grandfather, Abraham, Jacob could obtain righteousness only through faith in God's grace, not through his own efforts at goodness. Jacob also petitioned God to deliver him from Esau. Then he opened his heart before the Lord to reveal specific elements of his internal struggle. Jacob confessed that he was fearful because of the impending threat that his family would be brutally destroyed. The phrase "mother with the children" (32:11; literally, "mother upon children") alludes to an ancient proverb in which a female bird is pictured as shielding her young from attack with her own dying body.

In times of distress, men of faith must find comfort in God's Word. Jacob recalled the exact words of God's promise to him—"I will surely do you well" (32:12). He also identified with God's promise to Abraham—his seed would be as "the sand of the sea" (32:12). He claimed God's blessing to Abraham as though it had been spoken to him personally; in so doing, he demonstrated an increasing readiness to accept his position as the third great patriarch in the messianic lineage. This was another example of the growth in Jacob's faith.

Having finished his first prayer, Jacob selected goats, sheep, camels, cows, and donkeys—about 550 animals—to give to Esau as a present. Then, in the dark of night, he sent his family ahead with his herds to cross the Jabbok River, a waist-deep river about 30 feet wide. Jacob stayed behind to prod the stragglers on. He was alone with his anxieties. It is difficult to know the exact nature of the struggle that followed.

Until daybreak, Jacob wrestled with "a Man"—the Lord in the form of a man. According to Hosea 12:3–5, this was both a physical and a spiritual struggle. Jacob showed a fervent desire to gain the Lord's blessing. Hosea indicates that Jacob won the wrestling match through supplication and weeping, not through any physical prowess that he, a 97-year-old man, might have demonstrated against his Creator.

Man cannot fully see the face of God and live (Ex. 33:20). As dawn was breaking, therefore, the Lord asked Jacob to let Him go. Jacob seems to have understood this (Gen. 32:30), and yet he was prepared to suffer the consequences rather than face Esau without having received the blessing he sought. The Lord asked Jacob's name, perhaps to call attention to his old nature—a deceiver who used secrecy to attain his goals. Then the Lord changed Jacob's name to Israel, which means "God's fighter." Although Abram's name had been permanently changed to Abraham, Jacob would be identified by both names throughout the remainder of his life; the transformation in his character was gradual. He sometimes slipped back into deception, even in his later years. In fact, Jacob does not seem to have completely yielded his will to God until he worshiped Him at Bethel in Genesis 35. In other words, he continued to strive with God.

Jacob asked the Lord, "Tell me Your name, I pray." In Hebrew thought, a man's character was expressed in his name. Jacob was not prepared to receive such knowledge, so the Lord declined to fulfill his request; it may be that Jacob's motive for desiring that knowledge was improper (thus the Lord's question to him in 32:29). We are not told the exact nature of the blessing granted to Jacob. The Lord's revealing Himself to Jacob was a blessing in itself.

We might expect a sinful mortal like Jacob to perish after seeing his glorious Creator. Only the grace of God prevented his death. Jacob realized that and memorialized the event by renaming the site Peniel because he had seen the “face of God,” and yet his life (literally, his soul) had been spared.

Jacob’s fear of Esau was rooted in a wounded conscience. He knew that he had created the enmity between them through his own deception. When Jacob encountered Esau, therefore, he alternately bowed low before him and then advanced, repeating this courtesy seven times. Seeing Jacob’s family, Esau said, “Who are these with you?” (33:5). In keeping with ancient Eastern custom, Esau showed greater interest in Jacob’s children than his wives. Jacob’s reply demonstrates once again that his faith had advanced so that he was constrained to credit God with the blessing of a large family. Jacob may have tactfully avoided using the name Yahweh, who had established His covenant with Jacob rather than Esau. The patriarch introduced each of his immediate family members in the order he had earlier assigned to them.

Jacob seems to have reached a plateau of spiritual growth in this chapter. There were hard times ahead, and he would again be prompted to greater faith through the turmoil of his situation. But at least for a short while, the Lord permitted him to enjoy peace. Genesis 33:18 records Jacob’s homecoming to the safety and security of Canaan (specifically, the city that would later be named Shechem). This was a direct fulfillment of the Lord’s promise in 28:15. In addition to acquiring the land, Jacob showed patriarchal character in the erection of an altar (33:20). He called the altar El-Elohe-Israel (“the God of Israel is El, a Strong One”). There are three significant features in this act. First, Jacob built an altar to worship the Lord. Second, he adopted for himself the new name given him at Peniel. Third, he demonstrated that the Lord was his God, not merely the God of Abraham and Isaac. Jacob had a long way to go in his quest for spiritual maturity and patriarchal character, but his arrival back home after 20 years of absence at least marked the first step in that quest.

POINT TO THE TRUTH

"Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth" (Psalm 78:1).

This section includes questions to review last week's lesson and ideas to prepare students for this week's lesson. Choose from the following ideas to point to the truths of this lesson.



Review Questions

Use these questions to review and reinforce key truths.

What are the names of Isaac and Rebekah's twin boys, and what were they like? *Esau had lots of red hair and loved to hunt animals. Jacob was quiet and liked to cook.*

Why did Esau sell his birthright to Jacob? *Esau didn't care about his birthright, and he sold it to Jacob for some food.*

How did Jacob get the family blessing? *Jacob wore Esau's clothes and put hair on his arms.*

Why did Jacob leave home? *Jacob was afraid because Esau was going to kill him. His parents wanted him to go find a good wife at Haran.*

What did God tell Jacob in the dream? *God told Jacob He would be with him wherever he went.*



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Blocks or Bricks

Use blocks or other materials to build a tower strong enough to hold up a light object such as a plastic bowl or some papers. Jacob built an altar to God to thank Him for keeping His promise to bless him and his family.



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Gift Center

Set up a table with small boxes, wrapping paper, tissue paper, ribbon, tape, and safety scissors. Bring some objects the students can wrap up to take home. Some choices might include pretty rocks, silk or plastic flowers, pictures from magazines, or seashells. In today's Bible lesson, Jacob gave his brother Esau a gift. The gift was live animals, which was a surprise to Esau because he was not expecting all these animals. The students can wrap their surprise gifts to take home to someone who is not expecting to receive a gift from them.



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Whisper a Message

Divide the class into two teams, the "Jacobs" and the "Esaus." They could be identified by different colored strips of fabric used as arm bands. To the first student on the Jacob team, whisper, "Your servant is coming back." Whisper to the first Esau, "I am coming to meet you." Those first two students should whisper their messages to the next people in line on their teams, who then pass the message along. It will be fun to hear the messages from the last students in both lines. You could begin the game with other messages and end with those just given. Other messages might be, "It is a great day to learn God's Word" or "Hi. I am glad you came to Sunday School today."

PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

“Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done” (Psalm 78:4).

This section includes the Bible lesson, lesson questions, and praise and worship ideas. Song suggestions are included to use during worship time. Use the lesson questions to check the students’ understanding. This section also includes various presentation ideas to use during the teaching time. Read the Bible passage several times before you read these pages. All teaching should be done directly from the Bible.

Bible Lesson

Reading of the Text

Read Genesis 32.

Jacob was glad to be going back to Canaan, where his father lived, but he was afraid to see his brother Esau. He wondered whether Esau was still mad at him for lying and taking the family blessing away from him. Jacob sent a messenger back to his brother with this message: “Your servant Jacob is coming back to Canaan. Will you forgive him for pretending to be you when he took the family blessing?”

Esau sent a message back to Jacob: “I am coming to meet you, and I am bringing 400 men with me.” Uh-oh! What would happen now? Jacob was afraid of Esau and his men. He thought that Esau would try to hurt his family. Jacob divided his family and animals into two groups. He put one group over here [point to one side] and one group over there [point in the opposite direction]. He hoped that if Esau attacked one group, the other group could get away safely.

Then Jacob remembered God’s promise to be with him. Jacob knew what to do when he was afraid, so he talked to God and said, “Dear God, You have promised to be with me wherever I am. I don’t deserve anything from You, but You have blessed me with many children, sheep, and goats. Now You have told me to go back home to Canaan, but I’m afraid that my brother Esau will come and hurt my family. Will you please help me now and save my family?” Jacob chose a gift for his brother Esau—220 goats, 220 sheep, 30 camels, 50 cows, and 30 donkeys. That was a very big gift, wasn’t it? Jacob’s plan was to soften his brother’s heart toward him by sending the animals as a gift. After Jacob had sent the gift animals, he took his family and the rest of his animals across the river. He then crossed back over the river and spent the night alone on the other side.

During the night, a “man” came to Jacob and wrestled with him. This man was actually the Lord Jesus, but Jacob didn’t know it then. Jacob was a strong man and held onto the man with all his strength throughout the night. When the sun began to come up, Jacob would not let go. He said, “I will not let you go until you bless me.”

The Lord said to Jacob, “I am changing your name from Jacob to Israel,” and then He touched Jacob’s hip so that it came out of its joint. From then on, Jacob had a limp when he walked. He would always remember that the Lord God had come to him and blessed him. The next day, Jacob saw Esau and the men riding toward him. Jacob was wondering what would happen now. Jacob walked toward Esau, bowing seven times as a servant would bow to a master. Esau got down from his horse and ran to give his brother a hug. Jacob and Esau hugged and cried because

they were so glad to see each other. God answered Jacob's prayer; his brother forgave him.

Esau said to Jacob, "Who are all these children I see?" Jacob said, "God has blessed me with many children." Jacob introduced Leah and her children and then Rachel and her son. Esau said, "What is the meaning of all these animals that came to me on the road?" Jacob said, "God has blessed me with many animals. These animals on the road are a gift to you."

Esau said, "I already have enough animals, my brother. You should keep them for your own flock." Jacob said, "Please accept this gift from your servant because God has given me more than I need. I would be pleased if you would accept my gift to you." Esau accepted the gift and invited his brother to come live by him. How thankful Jacob was! God was with him, keeping His promise to him.

A little while later, Jacob moved his family [move your feet] to a place called Bethel. Many years before, Jacob had a dream there [put your head down as though sleeping]. In his dream, he saw angels going up and down from heaven. He felt like he was in God's own house. In that dream, God promised to bring Jacob back and to give him a great blessing. He was finally back. God did just what He said He would. Jacob was blessed. He wasn't afraid any more. He built an altar to God at Bethel to worship Him.



Lesson Questions

Why was Jacob afraid to see his brother Esau?

Jacob was afraid that Esau was still mad at him and would try to hurt his family.

What did Jacob do when he was afraid?

Jacob prayed to God, he remembered God's promises, and he asked God for help.

What happened that made Jacob walk with a limp?

The "man," who was the Lord God, wrestled with Jacob all night and touched Jacob's hip, putting it out of joint.

What happened when Jacob and Esau saw each other?

They hugged and cried because they were so glad to see each other.

What did Jacob do when he arrived at Bethel again?

He built an altar and thanked God for keeping His promise to bless him.

Presentation Ideas



A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards

Use appropriate A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards with the lesson.



Betty Lukens Flannelgraph

Use appropriate flannelgraph pieces with the lesson.



Dividing the Herd

Use masking tape to make two large circles on the floor. At the beginning of the Bible lesson, read Genesis 32:6–8 to the class. Illustrate the idea of dividing the people and animals by dividing the students into two groups. Each group should sit in a separate circle for the rest of the lesson.

Variation One: Give each student a flannel picture of a person or animal. Mark two areas or circles on the board, and invite each student to put his picture into one of the areas.

Variation Two: Give one student several flannel pictures of people and animals. Have the student put his favorites in one area or circle on the board and the rest in the other area.



Hairy-Armed Esau

Tape pieces of red yarn to your arms, neck, and face. As you are doing this, ask the students whether they remember the name of the hairy man in Genesis. When the students say, "Esau," ask whether they remember why Esau was mad at Jacob. Jacob put fur on his arms and pretended to be Esau. He got the family blessing, and that made Esau very angry. Esau did not want to be Jacob's servant. He wanted to be the master.



A New Name

As students enter the classroom, give them each a name tag with a new name written on it. Explain that in today's lesson, they will learn that Jacob received a new name after he wrestled with God.

Praise and Worship

God Is So Good (God Answers Prayer)

I Will Call upon the Lord

Mighty Is Our God

Trust and Obey



Jacob's Prayer

In Jacob's prayer, the parts were four.
(Fold hands together, and then hold up four fingers.)

He talked to God and called him Lord,
(Hold up one finger; hold other hand to side of mouth; hold face upward.)

Confessed he was a sinful man,
(Hold up two fingers; hold other hand over heart, bow head, and shake head back and forth.)

Asked for rescue from Esau's hand.
(Hold up three fingers; make a fist with other hand.)

He remembered God's promised plan:
(Hold up four fingers; point to temple with other hand.)

Descendants like the grains of sand.
(Hold one hand flat and pretend to rub sand in fingers of other hand.)

PRACTICE THE TRUTH

“That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments” (Psalm 78:7).

Choose ideas from this section to review and apply the truths of the Bible lesson.



Rocks and Altars

Place eight (one- to two-inch) rocks in a lunch bag for each student. Let the students color their rocks with crayons or markers—two red, two blue, two green, and two yellow. Put one rock of each color in the bag. Pour out the rocks and line them up in the order they came out of the bag. Place the other four rocks in the same color pattern. Talk about the altar that Jacob built with stones when he wanted to thank God for being with him wherever he went. Let the students pile their rocks like an altar to remember that God was keeping His promise to Jacob, and He always keeps His promises to us, too.



Sharing Animals

Before class, make copies on cardstock of the animal picture-sheet located at the back of this lesson. Give a copy to each student. Have the students color the animals. These will be special gifts to give away. Talk about how Jacob gave his animals as a gift to Esau, and Esau accepted them. Have each student put his animals into an envelope with his name on it. Put all the envelopes in a basket. Gather the students into a circle and have each student pick an envelope. Make sure you read who this special gift is from.



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Animal-Basket Upset

Have the students sit on chairs in a circle, facing the center, except for one student who stands in the center. Use the same animals from the Sharing Animals activity. Give each student a picture of an animal. When the center person calls out the name of an animal, the students with that animal stand up and exchange seats. The center student quickly sits down in an empty chair, and the person without a place to sit is the new center person. Two animals can be called at the same time. Or “barnyard upset” can occur, where everyone jumps up and finds an empty chair to sit in.



Crossing the River

Place two ropes parallel on the floor, and ask the students to leap over the “river.” Repeat, making the “river” a little wider each time. When the river is too wide to leap, place “stepping stones” (rugs or papers) between the two ropes, and have the students carefully step their way to the other side. In our story, Jacob took his family to safety across the river.



Jacob, Jacob, Esau

Have the students play a game of “Duck, Duck, Goose” using the words “Jacob, Jacob, Esau.”



Praying Hands

Have each student fold a piece of construction paper in half. Trace both of his hands, with the wrist resting on the fold. Then have the students cut out their hand-



prints. When done, each student will have two hand cutouts that fold together. Cut and tape or glue the poem “Jacob’s Prayer” inside the praying hands.

Coloring Sheets

Give each student a copy of the coloring sheets at the back of this lesson. The students can color the pages in class or at home.

MEMORY VERSE

“And He said, ‘Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed” (Genesis 32:28).

Jacob's Animals



Jacob's Prayer

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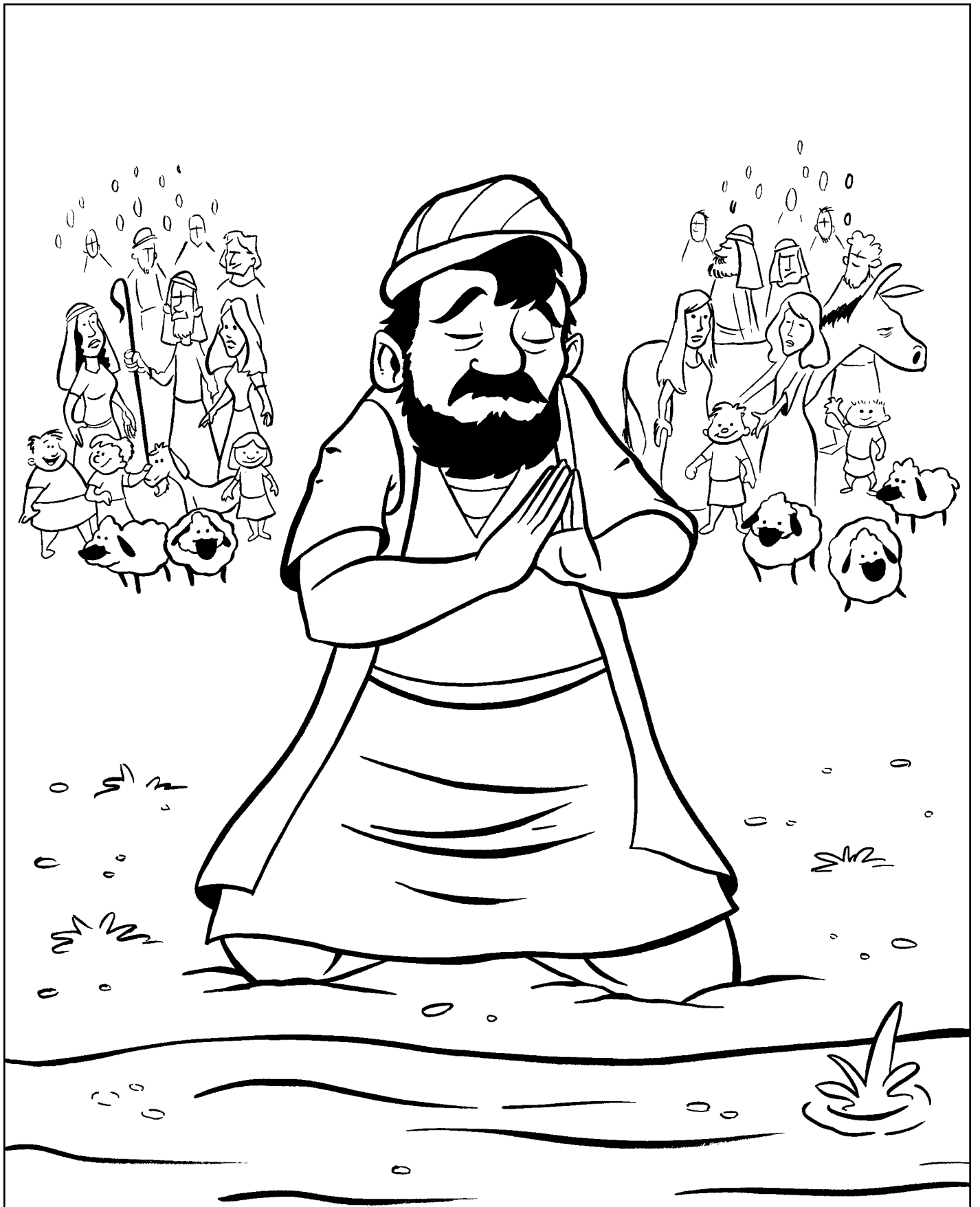
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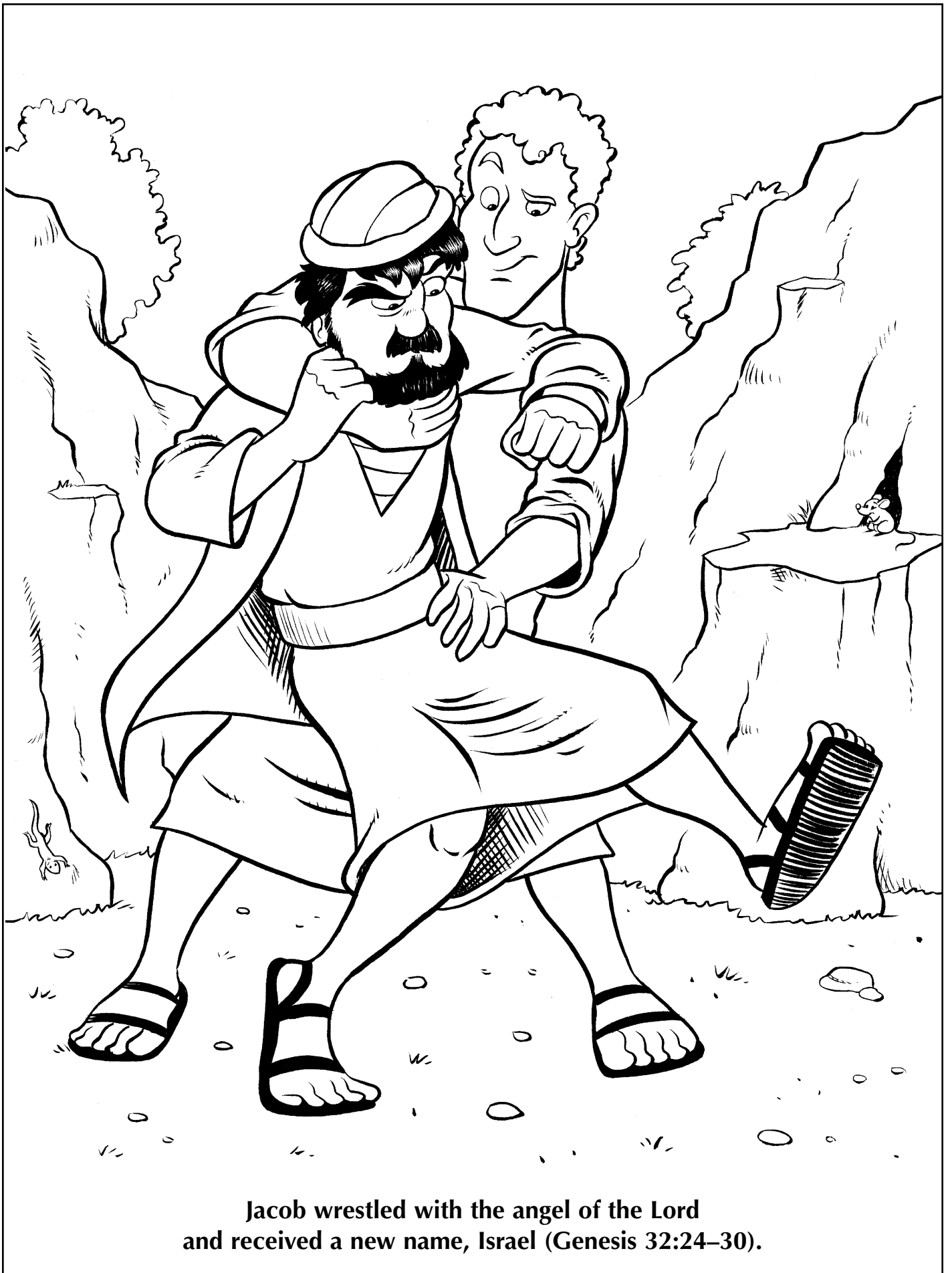
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Jacob prayed to God before meeting his brother, Esau (Genesis 32:7–12).



**Jacob wrestled with the angel of the Lord
and received a new name, Israel (Genesis 32:24–30).**

