



Jacob Wrestles with God

Genesis 32



LESSON GOAL

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

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Identify Jacob's motives in prayer.
- Summarize Jacob's prayer.
- Explain God's answer to Jacob's prayer.

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



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Activity



Q & A



Work Sheet



2 Grade Level

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

- _____
- _____
- _____

Materials Needed

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.

- _____
- _____

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 were the names of Isaac and Rebekah's sons, and who was born first?
Jacob and Esau; Esau was born first.

What did God tell Rebekah about her sons?
God told Rebekah that each son would be the father of a nation. One son would be stronger than the other, and the older son would serve the younger.

What was the main physical difference between Esau and Jacob?
Esau was hairy and Jacob was not.

Who was supposed to receive the blessing and why?
Jacob was to receive the blessing because God had chosen him over Esau.

What did Rebekah and Jacob do when they heard that Isaac was going to bless Esau?
They tricked Isaac into thinking that Jacob was Esau. Jacob brought Rebekah two goats, which she used to prepare savory food for Isaac. Jacob then put on some of Esau's clothes, and Rebekah put the goat skins onto Jacob's hands and neck so he would feel like Esau.

Was it wrong for Rebekah and Jacob to deceive Isaac?
Yes.

Did Isaac believe that Jacob was Esau?
Yes. Isaac gave Jacob the blessing, thinking he was Esau.

What did Esau want to do to Jacob when he found out about the trick?
Esau hated Jacob and wanted to kill him.

Where did Jacob go when he found this out?
Jacob went to his live with Laban, his mother's brother.



Fears

Talk about things that may cause us to be afraid, and discuss why each of these things causes fear. Have you ever been afraid of someone? Why? What happened when you confronted that person?



Whose Children Are They?

What are some names Scripture uses when it refers to God's chosen people? (Hebrews, Jews or Judeans, children of Israel). Why are they called the children of Israel? Are they the children of some guy named Israel? Well, believe it or not, the answer is yes. Who was Israel? Let students offer some guesses. Today we will find out!

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.

Introduction

What can a person do if he finds out that someone is really upset with him? How can a person make peace with someone who is mad at him? Has this ever happened to you? What did you do to make peace? What are some gifts people might give at a time like this? List some ideas on the board—maybe flowers or candy. In our Bible lesson today, Jacob finds himself in this situation. Do you remember who is mad at him? What do you suppose he does to make peace?



Leadoff Questions (LOQs)

LOQ: What was the first thing Jacob did as he was returning home to Canaan?

Answer: Genesis 32:3 says that “Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.” Jacob knew that Esau might still hate him, so he sent some people ahead to see how Esau felt about him. Jacob even told his messengers to address Esau as “lord” (Gen. 32:4). This was a title of honor in the Old Testament. Sarah called Abraham “lord” as a token of respect to him (Gen. 18:12). Jacob instructed the messengers in Genesis 32:5 to tell Esau that he had “oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.”

LOQ: Why did Jacob want Esau to know that he had so many things?

Answer: Jacob was saying to Esau that he was willing to share all that he had with him. Jacob wanted Esau to know that he had many things because if Esau knew that Jacob was willing to share all these things, then maybe he wouldn’t be so angry. But the messengers came back with disturbing news for Jacob. They told him that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men (Gen. 32:6).

LOQ: What did Jacob think about what the messengers told him?

Answer: Jacob was afraid. He thought that if Esau was going to meet him with 400 men, then Esau might try to destroy him and his family. As a result, Jacob came up with a plan. Genesis 32:7 says that he “divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies. And he said, ‘If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape.’”

LOQ: What did Jacob do besides dividing his people into two groups?

Answer: Genesis 32:9–12 says that Jacob prayed to God for help. There are four things Jacob did in his prayer to God. (1) He acknowledged God as his Lord (Gen. 32:9). For Jacob, the God of his grandfather Abraham and of his father Isaac was “the LORD.” Jacob told God that he remembered Him commanding him to return to his country and to his relatives, so that He could bless him. Jacob told God that he was going to trust Him completely. (2) He acknowledged that he was a sinful man (Gen. 32:10). Jacob said to God, “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant.” Jacob knew that he did not deserve anything that God had done for him. (3) He asked God to save him from the coming destruction. Jacob said to God in Genesis 32:11, “Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me.” Jacob was pleading with God to keep him and his family from harm. (4) In Genesis 32:12 he acknowledged the promise God had made to him. God had said, “I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.” Jacob wanted to make sure that God protected him from Esau’s anger.

LOQ: How do you think God answered Jacob’s prayer?

Answer: After reading Genesis 32:13–21, we see that God did not immediately answer Jacob’s prayer, even though He did have a plan to solve his problem. It was not that God would never answer it; He was just going to answer Jacob’s prayer when He wanted to. Remember that God can do what He wants to do and when He wants to do it.

LOQ: So what happened while Jacob was waiting for His answer?

Answer: Genesis 32:13 says that Jacob gave his servants 200 female goats, 20 male goats, 200 ewes, 20 rams, 30 milk camels with their colts, 40 cows, 10 bulls, 20 female donkeys, and 10 foals to give as a gift to Esau. Jacob, in Genesis 32:17, instructed his servants that they were to offer these animals to Esau as presents when he asked them, “To whom do you belong, and where are you going? Whose are these in front of you?” The servants were to tell Esau, “They are your servant Jacob’s. It is a present sent to my lord Esau” (Gen. 32:18).

LOQ: What did Jacob do next?

Answer: Genesis 32:24 says that Jacob was left alone for the night, and “a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day.” Genesis 32:25 says that Jacob tried very hard to win the wrestling match, but when the Man “saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob’s hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him.” Then in Genesis 32:26, the Man commanded Jacob to let Him go, but Jacob said, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!” What Jacob had realized was that this Man was the one who had come to Abraham (Gen. 18)—he was the angel of the Lord.

LOQ: So what blessing did God give to Jacob?

Answer: Genesis 32:27–28 says that God changed Jacob’s name to Israel. Jacob asked the Man for His name, but He would not tell him (Gen. 32:29). God had answered Jacob’s prayer by giving him a special blessing. The name *Israel* means “God’s fighter.” Genesis 33:9–10 also says that Esau was no longer angry at Jacob.

Summary

Jacob prayed to God, and there were four important things in his prayer. God answered Jacob's prayer by giving him a blessing. God answered Jacob's prayer because Jacob believed in Him. Even though Jacob was fearful, He knew where to go for help. He turned to God in prayer, and God answered his prayer. God protected Jacob from Esau's anger. What a wonderful God we have.

Application

It is a good thing that Jacob prayed to God. We can be like him and pray to God as well. But remember that God hears the prayers of those who believe in Him. To be a believer, you need to see yourself as God does—as a sinner, disobedient to His law. You also need to see that Jesus came and died on the cross so that He could forgive our sin and give us eternal life. It was not good that Jacob was afraid. We don't have to be afraid of the future because our God controls everything that happens.

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.

Praise and Worship

I Will Call upon the Lord

Mighty Is Our God

Standing on the Promises

Sweet Hour of Prayer

Trust and Obey

What a Friend We Have in Jesus

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.



2
3

“A Changed Man “

Give each student a copy of the “A Changed Man” work sheet. Fill in the blanks to complete each statement. Write the first letter of each answer on the blanks in the bottom right corner, and unscramble the letters to discover Jacob’s new name. Read Jacob’s prayer from Genesis 32:9–12. Beside each verse, tell what it shows about Jacob’s changed heart.



2
3

Releasing Our Fears to God

Copy the “Releasing Our Fears” cards onto cardstock so that each student can have a card. Review the things that were frightening to the students, discussed in small groups during the Point time, or have the students name new fears. Have them write these on the cards in the spaces provided and color the picture of Jacob praying. As a group or individually, look up the following Scripture references that encourage us when we are afraid. Psalm 118:6; Genesis 26:24; Psalm 27:1; Psalm 56:3; Psalm 56:11; Psalm 23:4–5; Psalm 91:4–7; Psalm 91:10–11; Jeremiah 1:8; Mark 5:36; Matthew 8:26; Matthew 10:31; John 14:27; Hebrews 13:6; 2 Timothy 1:7; Romans 8:15; I John 4:18. Each student should choose his favorite verse from the list and write it on the back of the card.



1

“I Can Pray Anywhere” Mobile

Place the coloring-sheet picture of Jacob praying in the center of a paper plate for each student. Around the bottom edge, at different lengths, tie on pictures of different places a child might go. For a hanger, tie a piece of yarn through a hole punched on the top of the plate. Talk about remembering that we can pray to God wherever we are.



“God Wrestles with Jacob”

Give each student a copy of the “God Wrestles with Jacob” work sheet, located at the back of the lesson. The students can complete the work sheet in class or at home.



2
3

Journal Page: “When I Am Afraid, I Should Pray”

Give each student a copy of the journal page at the back of this lesson. Students can work on the page in small groups, individually, or at home.

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).

A Changed Man

Fill in the blanks to complete each statement.

1. When Jacob heard that Esau was coming with 400 men, he was _____ (Gen. 32:7).
2. Jacob divided his family and possessions into two groups so that if one was attacked the other might _____ (Gen. 32:8).
3. Jacob prayed to the God of Abraham and his father _____ (Gen. 32:9).
4. Jacob remembered God's promise to make his descendants like the _____ of the sea (Gen. 32:12).
5. After Jacob's all-night wrestling match, he walked with a _____ (Gen. 32:31).
6. When Jacob arrived at Bethel, he got _____ of all the foreign gods in his household and worshiped God (Gen. 35:2).



Write the first letter of each answer on the blanks below.

Unscramble the letters to discover Jacob's new name.

Jacob's Prayer

Read Jacob's prayer from Genesis 32:9-12. Beside each verse, write what it tells us about Jacob's changing heart.

- v. 9 Then Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the LORD who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you:'" _____
- v. 10 "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies." _____
- v. 11 "Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children." _____
- v. 12 "For You said, 'I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'" _____

Fear Cards

Releasing Our Fears to God




*“Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you”
(1 Peter 5:7).*

Releasing Our Fears to God




*“Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you”
(1 Peter 5:7).*

Releasing Our Fears to God



*“Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you”
(1 Peter 5:7).*

Releasing Our Fears to God



*“Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you”
(1 Peter 5:7).*

God Wrestles with Jacob



Genesis 32

Name _____

1. When Jacob was on his way home, he sent messengers to _____.
2. The messengers returned with news that Esau was coming with 400 men. When Jacob heard this, he was _____.

glad to see his brother afraid and distressed

3. Jacob divided his family into two groups so that if Esau attacked one group, the other group could _____ (Gen. 32:8).
4. What did Jacob do as he waited for Esau's arrival? _____
5. Whom did Jacob wrestle with? _____
6. What did God change Jacob's name to? _____
7. Fill in the blanks from Genesis 32:30.

"And Jacob called the name of the place _____: 'For I have seen God _____ to _____, and my life is _____.'"

When I Am Afraid, I Should Pray

In our lesson we learned that when Jacob was afraid of Esau, he prayed to God. God answered his prayer and took his fears away.

Jacob's prayer had four parts. Read Genesis 32:9-12. In the first column, write down the four parts of Jacob's prayer. In the second column, write God's answers.

Jacob's Prayer

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

God's Answers

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

When I Am Afraid, I Should Pray

In our lesson we learned that when Jacob was afraid of Esau, he prayed to God. God answered his prayer and took his fears away.

Jacob's prayer had four parts. Read Genesis 32:9-12. In the first column, write down the four parts of Jacob's prayer. In the second column, write God's answers.

Jacob's Prayer

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

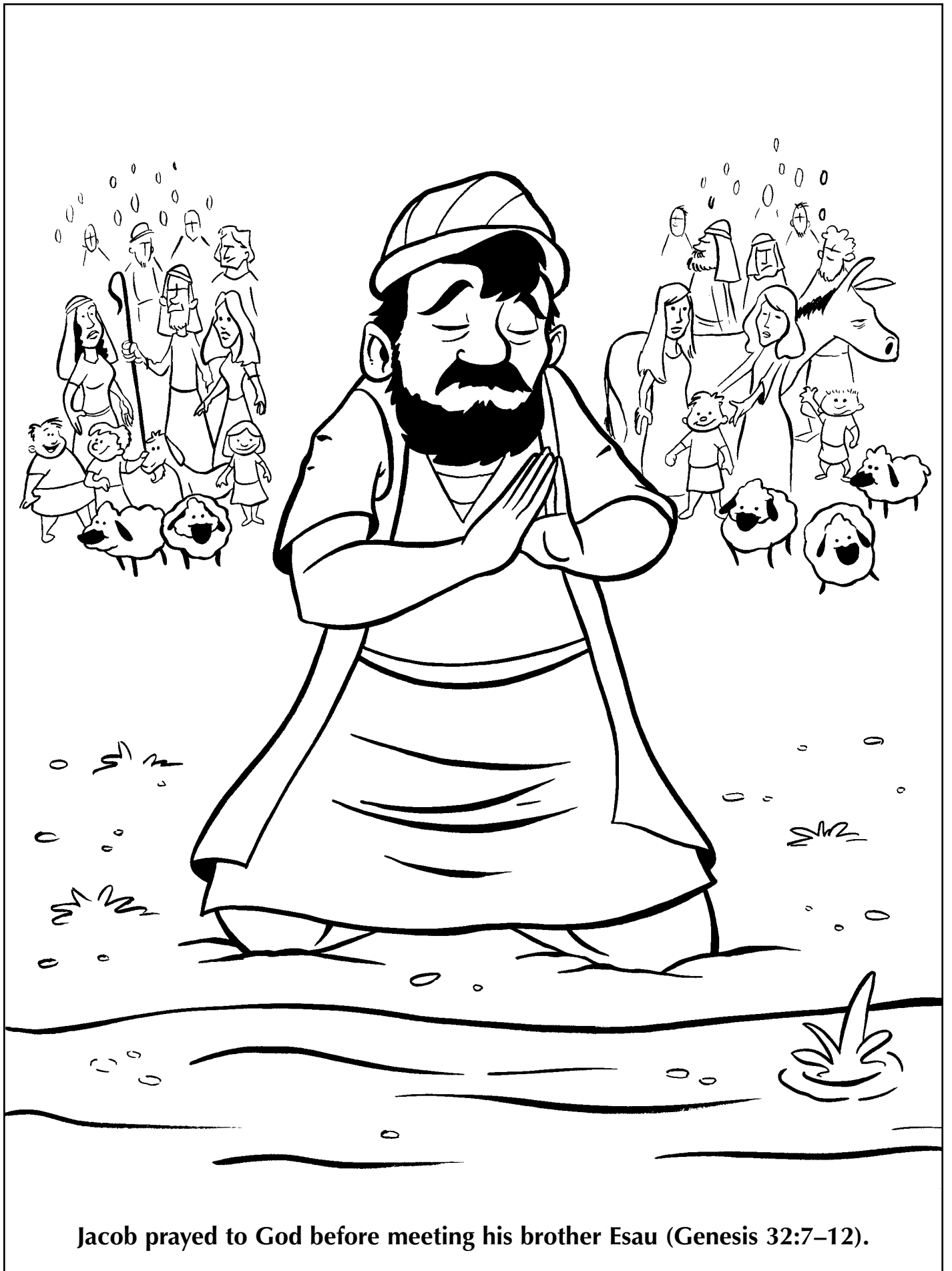
God's Answers

1. _____

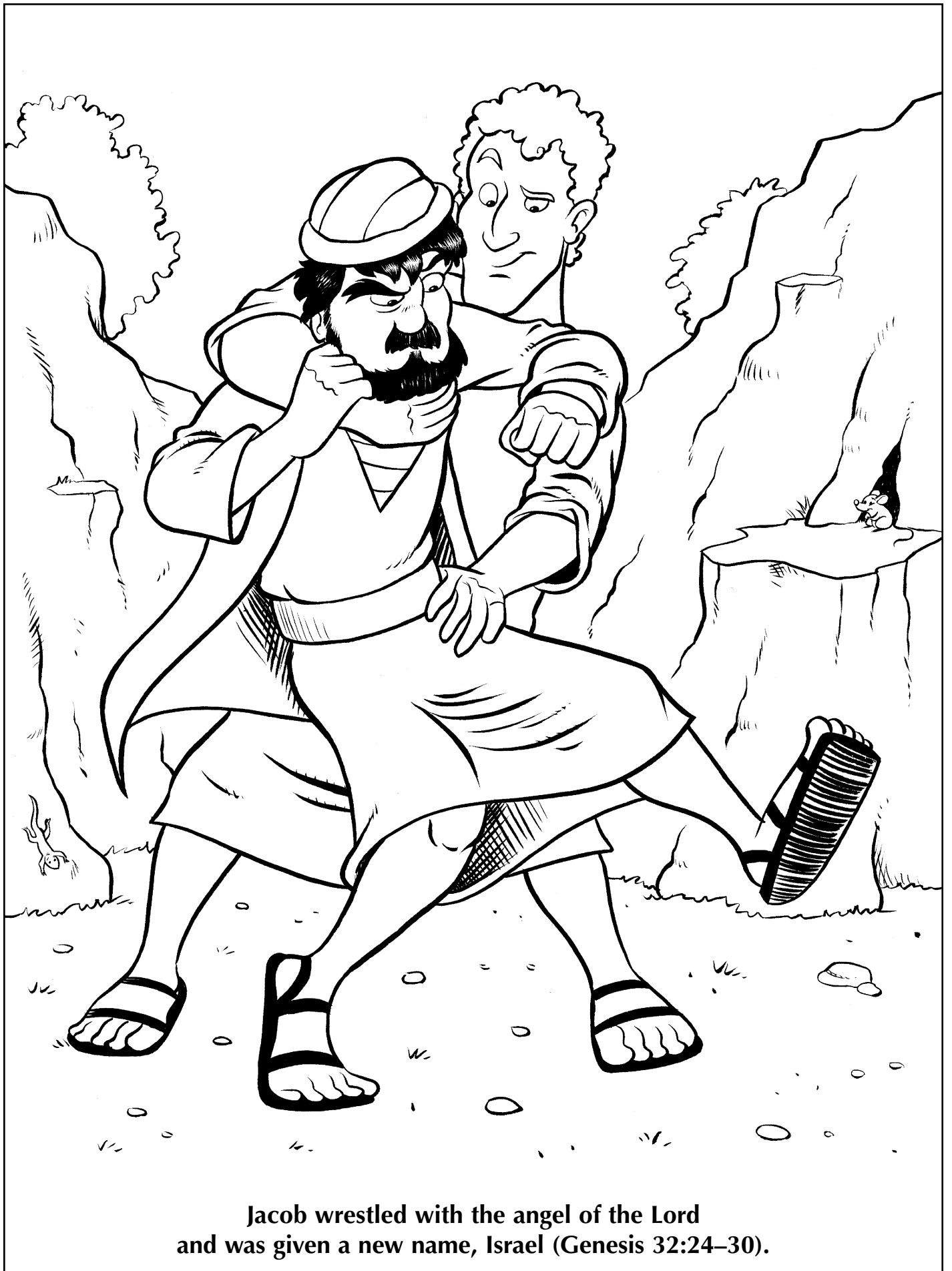
2. _____

3. _____

4. _____



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



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

